



CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF DESIGNERS

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I'm Femi Oresanya and I'm an architect. I've been involved in mentoring our next generation of interior designers and architects. The way in which we try to do that is first and foremost to involve some of the younger members of the office.

We've been running a program in the office for about 15 years where during the summer months, once the young students—15, 16, 17 and 18-year-olds—who are contemplating careers in the design profession finish their exams, we invite them to spend one or two weeks in our office to live the life of a designer.

We try to expose them to either a macroscale problem, such as a landscaping master planning problem, or a very small interior design-focused project, such as redesigning two rooms of their own house. Or actually have them think of designing a 'crib' for themselves.

This allows them, by using the software we use on a day-to-day basis, to think about what they're trying to do. For that to happen, I pull on our younger members of the office and they take charge in helping to mentor those young people. It's really important that our young graduates in the office mentor these people because it teaches our recent and young joiners how to impart knowledge. It also shows leadership skills, so in a way I'm using that to mentor them. We have a program where the senior designers do peer mentoring amongst each other. It's quite unofficial but we use that again to do some peer learning.

Diversity in our business is really important. Diversity creates innovation. Innovation creates wealth. But we also have to think about making sure this profession is attractive to the younger generation. To do that, we have to give them an avenue to experience what it's like. At HOK I'm quite lucky to be able to have the opportunity to mentor. We have to really put ourselves out there to mentor the next generation because our profession will not grow otherwise.