



# TEAM

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Bernard E. Healy  
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## “GRAFFITI SUPPLANTS DIALOGUE IN MAN’S POLLUTED ENVIRONMENT” — HEALY

Reluctantly, we're slowly accepting a fact which has been obvious for a long time—we and our environment are synergistic. Equally obvious is the fact that our environment is rapidly deteriorating. The evidence is everywhere; most notably in the deterioration of our urban areas and the structures within them. Indeed, some parts of our major cities have sometime since declined to the level of the symbolic “dirty lavatory.” Correspondingly, it seems as though our ability to communicate about this process of decline has been reduced, appropriately enough, to the level of graffiti. Select any one of our cities at random, and take a short walk through it (if you dare); read the messages scrawled on the broken walls—they're always bold and clear, and what's more important, they're usually damned relevant!

One such message was effectively presented on the cover of the March issue of Harper's Magazine. “Up the Organization,” this bold, bright bit of graffiti read. It hits a responsive chord. It's a modern thought forcefully presented in today's syntax. But let's not discount what's contained in this “hip” phrase. “Up the organization” is an incisive, sage, summary of a survey conducted by one Robert Townsend of some six thousand and one major institutions currently operating in the United States. (Townsend is the man who turned Avis around, following a highly successful career with American Express.) He flatly states that no fewer than 6,000 of these are ineptly led. His book, *Up the Organization*, promises to be this year's most provocative business publication.

But what does all this have to do with the practice of architecture? First, let's recognize that many architectural principles have come to appreciate that the skills essential to successfully managing time and money are as indispensable to superior architectural performance as are design skills. One proof of this is to be found in the kinds of firms selected to implement HUD's Operation Breakthrough program. Among them are consortiums formed of some of the nation's largest business and architectural institutions. They have been combined to achieve, hopefully, selected benefits of each. We say “hopefully” because if Robert Townsend's conclusion is considered, there seems good reason to doubt that “big, successful institutions” are the only, or even the best answer. Townsend notes, for example, that “big, successful institutions aren't successful because of the way they operate, but in spite of it. They didn't get to the top doing things the way they're doing them now.”

Therefore, there is no assurance that the way to obtain business acumen is to simply “dock” the changing vehicle of big business alongside the evolving entity which is today's major architectural office. Nor can we be sure we'll get the best performance features from each. Like DDT, the negative elements might prove to be cumulative.

That's the negative aspect. However, ARA has always assumed a positive posture with the result that we who belong to ARA have for many years been called (among other things), the “nuts and bolts” architects, which is another way of saying that we've always chosen to be realistic about architectural practice. Long ago, ARA fully accepted “business” as a member of the architectural “team.” Right now, a corporate entity, “TEAM, INC.” is functioning, growing, and soon will be able to provide the small, independent architectural office with the organization and a performance potential equal to those of any “conglomeration.” Admittedly, we do not, as yet, have all of the answers; but we do know that we're asking the right questions, and what's more important—when, how, and whom.

The problems inherent in today's housing crisis are not new. In 1932, the editors of *Fortune Magazine* said, “it is by no means an overstatement to say that the housing situation is the disgrace of American industry”—that in 1932! You'll find this statement in the article, “Housing America,” purportedly written by Archibald MacLeish, confidante of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. At that time virtually half the population of this country was ill-housed, and MacLeish blamed this part of the free enterprise system which he claimed had “signally and magnificently muffed” its opportunity to satisfy the huge housing market. Also blamed were land speculation, exorbitant finance rates, obstructive labor tactics, contradictory building codes, and oppressive tax laws. So what's new? After the lapse of 38 years—which has seen six presidential administrations, 18 congressional sessions, and a GNP increase of \$847.3 billion dollars, the problem seems only to have worsened. In 1932, the *Fortune* article observed that “no amount of organization and no excellence of design will solve the housing problem unless the land problem is solved with it”—sound familiar? The next question is obvious—who is best qualified to solve the land problem? Is it big business, the proprietary developer, the planner, the architect, the engineer—each of them individually . . . or all of them working together as a team? In the process, let's not overlook the team's key quarterback, the environmental designer; for increasingly we are obliged to recognize that ecology is central to everything we attempt.

A businesslike approach to problem solving is mandatory for today's architect. ARA's contribution to the item of graffiti we analyzed above might read “step up the organization!” As for the ultimate betterment of our environment, much depends upon the position of the architect on the emerging building team. Against sizeable odds, ARA is making the voice of the architect heard. Before very long every architect will be very well aware of what ARA has been saying for years —“the team is here; you'd do well to get with it.”