

Outside the Box: Haril Pandya of CBT Architects (Video)

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Catherine Carlock
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Haril Pandya

Title: Principal, CBT Architects

Age: 43



Education: Bachelor's degree in buildings sciences from **Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute**, 1993; bachelor's degree in architecture from Rensselaer, 1994

Residence: Needham

Haril Pandya leads the repositioning and asset strategy group at CBT Architects, which has grown from five to 37 employees in the past four years. The group works with building owners and tenants to create a design strategy

to improve the perception and identity of an existing building. Its projects are scattered across Greater Boston, including 53 and 60 State St.; 99 and 100 High St.; One Post Office Square; and the Prudential Tower lobby, among many others.

But Pandya's not resting on his laurels, as he recently explained to BBJ Real Estate Editor Catherine Carlock.

How did your group at CBT start? We've been doing projects like this for a decade, but the group in its current form is four years old. Back when we started, nobody was really packaging it as a service. Today, four short years later, a lot of people are talking about it. But I think the real estate industry is already behind. If you're repositioning buildings now that you have in a portfolio, I think that's yesterday. That's what we're looking at right now in our group – what's the next wave?

Why is that important? Everything is cyclical. You don't want to do the same thing for a long time, because it becomes formulaic. If you're not self-reinventing, that's just a business model problem. It's about evolution, disrupting, agitating.

So what do you think that next wave is? Look beyond the trend, because the trend is now. Everybody believes that Millennials are the future. To me, Millennials are the present. Who's going to be in your workplace in the next five to 10 years? They're probably about 15 years old today. I call them GenZ, or "Generation FOMO" (fear of missing out). There's a stylistic shift that will define how they work, because we're not technology bound. "Where" has nothing to do it with anymore; the shift now has everything to do with "how."

What drew you to architecture? I was impacted by my dad, who died when I was really young. He was a civil engineer, and he built stuff in India before he came over here. My parents wanted me to be an engineer because that's what Indian people did, I guess? I knew I wanted to be an architect. After my dad passed, mom and I moved in with my aunt and uncle, and my uncle treated me like his own son. He said, 'If you want to do architecture, do it.' I started thinking about it really early, stuck with it, and haven't looked back.

Best part of your job? The obvious part is the quality of work we're doing, and the ability to change the urban landscape that we live in, and the legacy quality to it, which is just amazing. But I come in here every day because of my team. I always tell everybody, 'If you're not having fun here, you shouldn't be here.'

Lesson you've learned as a manager? You have to allow a level of entrepreneurship. People have to feel empowered, from the most junior to the most senior – they have to feel they're a part of something.

Music has also been a big part of your life. There hasn't been a month since 9th grade that I haven't played in a band. Somebody gave me a Casio keyboard around then, and I had a friend who played music, and I asked him to teach me. When I wanted more instruments, my uncle said, 'You have to earn it. Why don't you do chores, and I'll put a value to it?' I charted it, and it was about \$950 worth of stuff.

First job? I worked at the Needham Public Library. I put away books.

What's a book that shaped your childhood? Shel Silverstein's "Where the Sidewalk Ends," because it was just so magical. Nowadays I'm fascinated by sociology and human behavior, this whole generational thing, and I read all of Simon Sinek's stuff – he just nails it.

What's something not many people know about you? I've always, always, always loved stand-up comedy. I would love to be in movies. I think all that stuff is just fun. I love humor; that's how I communicate.