obvious, compare the following statements made by a client and design team to express the same process:

- **Client***: "First select the architecture, then design the system, then program."*

- **Design team***: "First develop the program, then design from the program, then build the architecture."*

In this case, the client is a multinational consulting firm with roots in information technology and systems development. Imagine how such transposition of terms and sequences could hinder a successful project launch.

In addition to creating confusion, "foreign language" can alienate the client from the designer and the design process. Moreover, a person's self-esteem can be bruised if he or she feels less knowledgeable about a subject—particularly if the subject is discussed in apparent code. Commonly, these subjects include:

- *Highly technical or detailed issues of electronics or machinery*

- *Detailed knowledge of the furniture industry*

- *Color*

- *Spatial attributes*

- *Elements and principles of design (rhythm, balance, proportion, mass, form, etc.).*

Designers provide a terrific service when they carefully guide clients and all project participants along the project path in areas where individuals may be uncomfortable or unable to express their views.

BUILD TRUST THROUGH ONE-TO-ONE RELATIONSHIPS

Despite the value of standardized communications, designers and clients share much knowledge and information in situations that are not necessarily prescribed by the project process: frequent phone calls, short conversations during meeting breaks, an exchange of thoughts during an elevator or cab ride. These unplanned encounters, when designers and client interact one on one, can be effective ways to learn from one another, and they may serve as the building blocks for interpersonal relationships that outlast a

single project and result in a long-term association between client and interior designer.

Such one-to-one relationships need not arise solely for the sake of project efficiency, but also out of common interests or sheer interpersonal chemistry, so it is important to cultivate an atmosphere where rapport can build between individuals on both sides of the project. Primarily, this atmosphere requires that designers see team members unrestricted by job titles and work responsibilities. The designer must recognize where natural "fits" occur, and allow those relationships to form.

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS AT THE RIGHT TIME

One of the most important skills in client management is the ability to ask excellent questions. The designer must draw out the client's desires in terms that are specific enough for the designer to deliver a solution that does not merely meet expectations, but totally satisfies.

LISTEN

Reaching a true understanding of what the client wants can feel like an exercise in mind reading, but it is really an exercise in effective listening. The designer must be invested in listening for answers—both to the questions that have been asked (as described above), and to those that have not.

RESPOND

The designer's ultimate response to the client will be the end product: the designed environment. But the client must sense a designer's responsiveness long before the project is completed. In fact, some clients expect a response from the designer daily, or even more often during critical phases of the project. The following precepts demonstrate "responsiveness" in action.

- **Keep the client informed.** *The client has a right to know what is happening. Regular status reports and meetings may be sufficient under normal circumstances. If a special issue or problem arises, the designer may need to offer updates via phone or e-mail, or even an impromptu meeting.*

- **Be available.** *The client is paying to be able to talk with the designer, whenever he or she wants, during working hours. So the designer must be accessible. If the designer needs to be inaccessible*