

Editorial | Paying the Debt to Our Profession

By David W. Mykins, P.E., Chair CASE Executive Committee



A few years ago, shortly after I had moved into our founding partner Roger's office, I sat down to start my day. As I was looking at my busy calendar (meetings, reviews, financials, etc.), I noticed a small piece of paper taped to the wall where Roger might have seen it every day as he sat down at his computer. On it was this simple message, "All professionals owe a debt of time and talent to the enhancement of their profession." For a moment, I stopped focusing on the company's bottom line and began to recall the many ways in which he embraced this message and encouraged the rest of us to do the same.

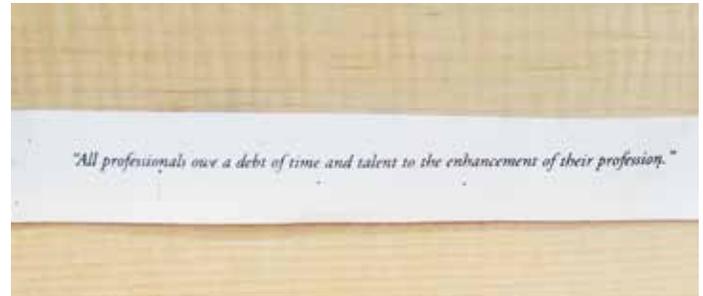
Throughout his career, I observed him not just becoming a member of engineering organizations, but volunteering for committees, serving on boards, and, in many cases, eventually leading these organizations. I also recalled the way that he inspired others to follow his lead and contribute to the enhancement of the engineering profession. So I thought I would explore the opportunities for all of us to embrace this message.

There are so many ways that engineers can give a little something back to the profession. Perhaps the most obvious is to join one of the state or local chapters of the major engineering organizations, like NCSEA, SEI, or CASE. Many of these groups have regular meetings and local committees or task groups that are always looking for fresh new ideas and helping hands. This is a great place to start and explore how this profession excites and inspires you. But don't just attend; the real value of membership is realized when you become involved.

Another avenue for engineers to help the profession is by recruiting future generations of engineers. There have been many articles describing the loss of labor expected to occur as the baby boomers begin to retire. It is forecast that 50% of the entire workforce will retire by 2020 and the labor pool behind them is not large enough to replace them. That means there is likely to be a shortage of workers across every sector. To help reduce the effects of this for engineering, we can become proactive in recruiting the best and brightest of our young people by encouraging them to enroll in STEM tracks in middle and high school. There are STEM summer camps offered by local public schools to promote careers in engineering and the sciences that would

love to have practicing professionals give short presentations to help get young people excited about these career opportunities. It's easy and very rewarding to get involved at this level.

Volunteer organizations are another opportunity for engineers to give back, by donating their time and talent toward the betterment of others. Across the country, there are active chapters of Engineers Without Borders (EWB) and similar faith-based groups. Organizations like EWB help communities in developing



countries around the world meet basic human needs like clean water, sanitation, and safe structures. Often these projects are more challenging and require greater creativity than we experience designing projects in the developed world. Many of these projects are in remote locations with very limited physical resources and a mostly unskilled labor force. The innovation needed to provide safe, simple solutions that can be easily implemented is both challenging and rewarding for those who choose to volunteer.

Engineers can also contribute in meaningful ways to their communities by volunteering time and talent to charitable organizations. These groups can benefit from the unique skills and expertise that engineers possess. An obvious choice for structural engineers is Habitat for Humanity. But active involvement in any charitable organization enhances the profession. Providing an example of selfless service in support of others elevates the level of respect for the profession in the eyes of those who observe it. It can also be very personally rewarding to know that you are making a difference in the lives of people who are less fortunate than you. Most of us have someone in our family or extended family with a special need or illness, or we know someone who does. It is often more fun and meaningful to attach a personal connection to your choice of charitable organization to support.

I can guarantee how rewarding giving back to the engineering profession, future engineers, your community, and even the world can be. But also, you never know, your company's bottom line might also be rewarded by the relationships and connections you make along the way.

It's hard to believe that my two years as Chairman of CASE are coming to a close. I have been honored and humbled to have had the opportunity to share my thoughts through the many editorials I have written for STRUCTURE magazine. I hope I have stimulated some thought and discussion on the topics I have advanced, and contributed in some small way to the dialogue in our profession. I will be turning over the reins of leadership in CASE to the capable hands of Corey Matsuoka of SSFM International, Honolulu, Hawaii. In closing, I encourage you all to think of structural engineering not as a job, but as a responsibility and a lifelong passion. ■



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