



Advantages of Professional Young Member Groups

By Edward Major II, E.I.T.

Being a young engineer can seem incredibly daunting. You are surrounded by professionals who tell you “that is not how I did it when I was in your position.” While I have several years until I can obtain my P.E. license, many of my coworkers and supervisors have their professional licenses. They recognize that, as a young engineer, I have a lot to learn. They have been exceptional at teaching me through involvement on projects and inclusion in conversations. When not in the office, though, I expand my knowledge base with my involvement in professional societies such as ASCE and NCSEA, and their respective young member groups.

These young member groups are subsets of the larger societies and their sections/branches. They allow me to converse and interact with those in a similar career position. Who else knows better what it is like starting off at the bottom of a tall ladder than someone standing next you at the bottom? I would like to take this chance to outline what I believe to be the three most important advantages of professional societies – and more importantly, their young member groups.

Not to state the obvious, but networking is crucial

You have heard it time and again through college: Networking is key. Network with your peers. Network with professionals. Did you listen? If so, you are on the right path. As overly used as it is, it is more than worth repeating: networking is crucial. Several years ago, I knew an engineer who was laid off. There was nothing she could have done to prevent it. Within two weeks, she was employed again. She found another job so easily because she kept her network strong. Keep current with your network. Maintain your LinkedIn profile and keep your employment history up to date. By staying involved with a young member group (or simply a professional society in general), you will always have material and updates to post. Share a flier for your group’s next event or meeting. Share some words of wisdom taught to you by an older, more experienced engineer.

In person, be brave and talk to that senior engineer at the evening social your group is hosting. Do you think they are just there to stand around? These experienced engineers come to your events because they want to talk to you. The more you actively connect with your network, the more likely they will be able to help you when you are in a tough spot.

Continuing education...because learning never stops

For professional engineers reading this, you know all too well what this means. Three words: professional development hours. To keep your license current, you need to prove to your state board that you are keeping up with the times. As codes change, designs become more complex, and architects push boundaries, you must adapt. There are many ways you can earn continuing education credits to renew your license, but memberships in professional societies give you access to a multitude of resources and PDH opportunities at a discount. In addition, you will have an easy time meeting new peers. Young member groups want a diverse following of young engineers, young professionals, and seasoned professionals to facilitate interaction among their members. Offering technical events for professional development hours achieves this goal and thus helps you grow your network (see advantage number 1 above).

Improve your management and public speaking skills

This is especially important if you are on track for a management position or even if you find yourself conversing with your clients as a project manager. While serving as the technical/employment chair for the Pittsburgh ASCE Younger Member Forum, I was responsible for sharing the committee’s plans for technical events. If I was not



Middle school STEM outreach by the ASCE Pittsburgh Younger Member Forum.

proficient at public speaking when I started in this position, I certainly am now. On the management side, we *plan* the events. This involves booking a venue, ordering food, registering attendees, and important administrative tasks. If you are on track for a management position in your career, take advantage of being a leader in one of the professional organizations in your area. It is the best training you will find.

These are the three benefits that I have found most crucial during my involvement with young member groups. There are countless more. Your personal experiences in these organizations will define what you find most valuable about them. While some may relish the social events and the comradery of being with fellow engineers, others value the technical events and continuing education opportunities. The important part is that you find what *you need* in one of these groups. Whatever your needs are as a young engineer, you cannot satisfy them alone, but your network can help. ■

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