



Why Do I Participate in Professional Activities?

By Stacy Bartoletti, S.E., Chair CASE Executive Committee

I have just returned from the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) Annual Meeting and the Council of American Structural Engineers (CASE) Executive Committee Meeting in Washington, D.C. The conference marks the start of my two-year term as Chair of CASE. Given my new role, I reflected upon the time I invest in professional activities. These activities always make me feel invigorated and energized about our profession. Energy and passion can come from several different areas; why choose professional activities?

It might be easier on my personal life, and perhaps better in the short term for my firm, to just keep my head down and focus all of my attention on running a successful business, taking care of clients, and supporting our employees. I fundamentally believe that it would be very short-sighted. Professional associations and their related activities rely heavily on volunteer time from members of the profession and exist to support the needs of the profession and individuals. Without volunteers and



leaders, the contributions these associations can make to the development of our profession and the engineering industry would be substantially diminished. In the long run, I believe that I get more than I give when supporting professional association groups.

Interaction with great people – Over the years, I have met and developed relationships with many great firm leaders and structural engineers. The interaction with these professionals, from across the country, is one of the best reasons to invest significant time in professional activities. Interactions with this extensive network influence my view of the structural engineering world and direction of my firm through my leadership. The network I have built through professional activities acts as a sounding board to understand how other businesses address issues and has even resulted in business opportunities through referrals or partnering.

Learn from the best and brightest – In the early part of my career, I had the opportunity to support a senior principal in our firm in his role as chair of the Structural Engineers Association of California Seismology Committee. I learned more from that activity about the basis for seismic code provisions than I could have from any class or any individual project experience. We are fortunate to participate in a collaborative profession that is highly engaged and attracts some of the best and brightest people in society. More recent interactions with CASE committees have allowed me to enhance my knowledge of business practices, project management, and risk management from numerous other structural engineering leaders. Professional activities are a constant reminder of the intellect, dedication, and high ethical standards of the people in our industry.

Give back to the profession – If a rising tide lifts all boats, then the process of professional involvement raises all of us as individual engineers and as firms of practice. As professionals, we should share much of what we do with others and not hold it close because we consider it a competitive advantage. As an example, my firm has been actively involved in and helped to lead the development of seismic standards for the evaluation of existing buildings for decades. We choose to participate in these

activities because we believe it advances the seismic safety of buildings for the benefit of the public and the profession. At the same time, it allows our firm to be at the forefront of seismic safety.

Advance our communities – Many states and communities are currently debating the appropriate performance expectations for buildings during hurricane and seismic events. These communities need our expertise in this debate. We live and work in communities that need dependable, expert advice to

make informed policy decisions. Only through participation can we influence results in our own communities.

Grow as a professional – Being a member of a profession such as engineering means that I also need to grow individually and continually learn. I believe this is a fundamental difference between practicing as a professional and just having a job. My participation in professional activities shaped me as much or more than anything else I have done since graduating from college and entering the engineering profession.

Grow business – Generating new business may not be a primary reason for participating in professional activities, but I believe it plays a role in growing and maintaining business for my firm. Is there a better way to gain expertise in specialty areas of structural engineering than to help develop the next generation of standards or code requirements? Participating in professional activities can help distinguish our firms and develop expertise in niche areas of structural engineering.

As an engineer and CEO, I think a lot about value and return on investment. I believe the long-term value to my firm and my development outweighs the short term cost of professional activities. I also believe that being considered a profession carries with it certain obligations; contributing to the advancement of the profession is one of those obligations. How do you give back to our great profession, and how does your firm support those that want to participate in professional activities?•



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