



10 Ways to Spend Ten Bucks

By Edward M. DePaola, P.E., SECB, F.SEI, M.ASCE

“Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life,” Confucius (supposedly) once said. If this is true, I have not worked in more than 40 years. Yes, I am one of those unbelievably lucky people who love what they do. Where I am today is because of a thousand little things that happened to me along the way, most of them positive, some of them negative, but all of them meaningful to me. These experiences have made me look at myself and my career from a different perspective than I think I would have had they not occurred.

Of course, it starts with the contributions of my parents, relatives, friends, professors, spouse, children, co-workers, and, well, you get the idea. You probably have your own list of important people. But the biggest thing I have learned in my life is the importance of the words “thank you.” Now, I know you don’t need anyone to tell you how to thank all of those people in your life. So this editorial will take a slightly different approach.

I want to thank my *profession* as well as all of the people in it. I also want to share with you how I give thanks, and how you might give thanks too.

The easiest way is to give back to the profession. For me, that has meant being very active in all professional societies, at first by volunteering for committees, then by organizing activities, and eventually by serving in leadership roles. I am proud to tell you that on October 1st of this year, I became the Chair of the Structural Engineering Institute Futures Fund (SEIFF) www.asce.org/SEIFuturesFund.

The Fund is about precisely what you think it is about: the future of our profession. All gifts that we receive are used to fund four strategic initiatives:

- Invest in the future of the structural engineering profession
- Promote student interest in structural engineering
- Support younger-member involvement in SEI
- Provide opportunities for professional development

Every year, we provide scholarships to students and young professionals to attend the Structures Congress. Last April, we had 20 students, and 25 young professionals attend. For next April, we have happily funded up to 65. Also, we are funding expenses for young professionals to participate in standards committee meetings. This gets them started with active involvement in SEI, and, as a bonus, we are seeing that many of them continue further, becoming more active and taking on more leadership roles in SEI.

When I think of a “fund,” I know that big donors always come to mind. Yes, SEIFF has corporate donors, including my firm, but we also have private donors, including my wife and me. And for the fiscal year 2019, the fund has received over \$60,000 from 5 firms and 119 individuals, an average of about \$390 each. But here is the kicker: SEI has over 30,000 members, and if each one of us gave just \$10, we would have more than \$300,000 to invest in the future of our profession. That is almost three times what we have funded for our 2020 initiatives.

Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.
– VINCE LOMBARDI

You may be asking, “What difference can a \$10 donation make?” Well, to make a difference, you do not have to do something big or costly. You do not have to start by chairing a committee or mentoring all of the younger engineers in your office. But if you think that there is nothing you can do to make a difference, think harder. Students who have come to the Structures Congress – often with the Futures Fund’s help – have returned year after year, and many have advanced in our professional societies; there is a whole alphabet of them. Yes, you can make a difference, and \$10 is all it takes.

To put all of this in perspective, I offer the following list of 10 ways to spend ten bucks, and how each one of them relates to everything else in our lives:

- 10) Buy a pack of cigarettes. No, wait. That’s a bad idea.
- 9) Go to a coffee chain and buy a cup of coffee. Better yet, you can get a coffee and a bagel from the guy with the street cart on the corner for \$1.50.
- 8) Buy a cheap bottle of wine. Not that you would really want to drink it.
- 7) Buy a cool gadget. Still, you will be bored with it in a few days, and it will end up on a shelf collecting dust.
- 6) Take a cab down 7th Avenue from 42nd Street to 34th Street. Nope, it is faster (and better for you) if you walk.
- 5) Buy your spouse a box of chocolates or some flowers. Bad idea – when they find out how cheap you are, you will be in the doghouse.
- 4) Buy a lottery ticket because, “Hey, you never know.” But you probably have a better chance of getting hit by lightning (don’t do that, either).
- 3) Deposit it in a savings account. At an interest rate of 0.1%, in 693 years you’ll have \$20. But at least we are moving in the right direction.
- 2) Invest it. A share of Ford Motor Company is currently trading at about \$8.50 – and you can still get that coffee and bagel! Now we are getting somewhere.
- 1) Invest it in the future of our profession. Contribute \$10 to the SEI Futures Fund. Best idea ever!

Keep in mind that the SEI Futures Fund has partnered with the ASCE Foundation to leverage its expertise in managing philanthropic gifts. You have our word that 100% of your gift goes directly to the SEI Futures Fund for investment in our profession, free of any administrative burden. So please join me and all of my colleagues on the Futures Fund board in contributing to our efforts to invest in the future of our profession. Yes, you can make a difference – thank you! ■



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