



Drinking the Kool-Aid®

By Ed Quesenberry, S.E.

When I reflect on my experience as an association volunteer, I am honestly surprised that I now serve as NCSEA President. Ten years ago, I was on the Board of Directors for the Structural Engineers Association of Oregon (SEAO). At that time, I was relatively naive about NCSEA. Despite the great work that NCSEA was doing on behalf of the profession, I only knew them as being part of the group that published STRUCTURE magazine. Luckily for me, an amazing structural engineer, the late Sue Frey, intervened a couple of years into my term on the SEAO Board and drastically changed my perception and understanding of NCSEA. I realize now that this simple shift in perception was made possible by my willingness to drink some Kool-Aid.

Sue convinced me to attend an NCSEA Summit as the Alternate Delegate from Oregon. Those three days I spent in Oklahoma City opened my eyes to the role NCSEA plays in the lives of practicing engineers and to all the behind-the-scenes work they do to support, promote, and advance the profession. Returning to Oregon, I shared my discoveries and excitement with my fellow engineers, to which many responded, “Ah, so you are drinking the Kool-Aid, eh?” I could not deny it – I was hooked.

I see one of my most important sworn duties as NCSEA President as encouraging each of you readers to try the Kool-Aid made by the national organizations that support our profession (NCSEA, SEI, CASE). To clarify, I am suggesting that by “drinking the Kool-Aid” these organizations offer, you would adopt the “extreme dedication to a cause or purpose” connotation of the phrase (credit Wikipedia) rather than the tragic Jonestown, Guyana, connotation. National level involvement in support of our profession can have significant upsides. So, as I hand you a nice, cold glass of refreshment, sit back and consider some of these upsides.

Expand Your Network

From a business perspective, it is important to focus on the most immediate marketplace to where you live, as it is likely the source of most of the work you have on your desk. Because of this, it is very easy to develop a regional view of what is going on in our industry. The first NCSEA Summit I attended expanded that view for me. I met engineers from all over the country and was captivated by how similar yet different structural engineering practice is in states other than those I had worked in. I was also able to meet legends of our industry that I had only read about, including Les Robertson, Gene Corley, and Charlie Thornton, and to hear them share their perspectives on structural engineering practice. Through my involvement in NCSEA, my

network has grown to include leading experts in many different facets of structural engineering practice. They have all been more than willing to offer their advice and assistance whenever I have asked. Involvement at the national level can broaden your view of the profession and help foster your growth and effectiveness as a practitioner.

Share Your Voice

Are you tired of people thinking you are an architect when you try to explain to them what you do? Is there a code provision that

really drives you crazy? Do you want more diversity and equity in structural engineering practice? If you answered yes to any of these, the national platform could be the place for you. There are ongoing initiatives on each of these topics at the national level right now and, to be fully realized, we need your unique voice. Whether it is acting on these national-level initiatives at the local level or joining the national effort, the opportunity for

you to make a difference is real and there for the taking. All you have to do is speak up, and you can help create change.

Help Secure the Future

Structural Engineering is arguably one of the noblest professions out there. Think about it; without us, the built environment would not be as safe and cool looking as it is today, yet we are somewhat of a hidden profession in the public eye. We do amazing things using math and science yet have generally accepted relative unanimity as the status quo. While this might be due in part to our nature as engineers, it is my opinion that this puts our profession at risk of being commoditized and outmoded. Volunteer organizations such as NCSEA, SEI, and CASE all have the support and advancement of the practice of structural engineering as part of their core missions. Due to the enormity of this undertaking, these organizations all require a robust pipeline of volunteers like you to make significant strides toward securing a resilient and prominent future for the structural engineering profession.

Enjoy Your Refreshments

Well, there are your three cups of Kool-Aid; I hope that at least one will be appealing enough for you to take a sip. To completely exhaust the metaphor, I will close by predicting that you will find the Kool-Aid highly refreshing and something you will want to share with all your friends. ■



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