

Editorial | ACEC/CASE Scholarship Award Winner

By John A. Mercer, P.E., SECB



The American Council of Engineering Companies and the Council of American Structural Engineers awarded a scholarship to a well deserving young engineering student, Mr. Eric Grusenmeyer. After reading Mr. Grusenmeyer's application, I was reminded of my early years in pursuit of the coveted title of P.E. behind my name.

It is quite apparent from Mr. Grusenmeyer's application that somewhere along the line in his limited experience of working for a consulting engineering firm, or albeit from his educational institution, that he has a great start in the "culture" for the responsibility of carrying out the duties of the structural engineering profession. "Engineers are bound to a code of ethics to provide for public health, safety, and well-being." In case you are wondering, CULTURE is the first of 10 foundations in the CASE Risk Management program.

Culture is an interface between the things we do, how we do them, and the spirit of the engineer and staff doing them. Some tasks are mundane, yet when put into proper perspective are necessary to complete the professional services that we provide our clients. The success or failure of a project is highly dependent on the firm's culture and the combined spirits of the team members. When staff members realize they are only one cog in the wheel and work harmoniously with other team members, much can be accomplished. Each successful team member seeks recognition for a job well done, but can also bask in the satisfaction of another getting the credit.

Mr. Grusenmeyer's application alluded to the challenges consulting engineers face to reduce structure damage created by natural disasters and constructed with limited resources. How right he is. It seems to be human nature to overlook the quality and integrity of a project for the sake of a few percent of the total project price. Notice I didn't say cost. I have been consulting for 30 years, and haven't found a substitute for the job being done right. I know you will say that there are many ways to do things right, and you are correct. However, product or material substitutions based on price alone do not always provide the performance the client expects or the project demands. This is when things become problematic

for the structural engineering firm depending on the wording of their contract agreement, the expectations of the client, and their relationship with their insurance company and legal counsel. I'm not sure that today's legal climate is any better or worse than it was a decade ago, but there must certainly be an increase in the number of hungry litigators available to add to an engineering firm's miseries. What resourceful imaginations they must have.

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What would you rather be doing, designing a project, playing golf with a client, or spending your billable time and evenings building a case file for your legal counsel to defend you from a law suit? Sort of a no-brainer, wouldn't you say? I have to say that CASE Guidelines for Practice, plus a good scope of work in a CASE Contract with your client, would give you an edge to be "on-in-three and two putting". You see, when you know what's coming, you can pre-empt it with your scope of services and a good set of terms and conditions in your contract. After a few years of mentoring by a seasoned structural engineer, Mr. Grusenmeyer will also be able to accomplish his intended career of pre-empting destruction of his firm by natural disasters by using CASE documents as a communication tool between his consulting firm and the firm's clients.

If, on the other hand, you happen to be encumbered with a pending law suit, did you use the CASE Tools to document your project? A submittals log would be one simple example, among many others, that could save a lot of your time and provide irrefutable evidence to protect you from allegations relating to the schedule and delivery of the project. What about the Toolkit's checklists to use on the job site from the preparation in your office, to the tools and safety equipment to take with you, and the site observation report? Putting educated eyes on the site is just as important as checking lines and dimensions on paper. A properly prepared observation team can identify issues that could be job stoppers before they happen, as well as build good will and appreciation from a qualified contractor. Building a project is a TEAM sport. Engineers do it best on paper, and contractors get it done in the field.

Mr. Grusenmeyer's education will be just beginning once he receives his Master's Degree. To be sure, another one of the CASE Risk Management's 10 Foundations, Education, will help Eric along his way to become a properly educated consulting structural engineer. Good luck, Eric. We have many more natural disasters to prepare for, and CASE will be there to help you assist your firm along the way. ACEC/CASE is proud to be able to play a small role in your success. ■

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