

Editorial | Contribute to Your Profession and it Pays You Back

By Andrew Rauch, CASE Chair



First, I would like to extend my condolences to the family, friends, and colleagues of Doug Ashcraft who recently passed away after a battle with cancer. Doug was instrumental in developing many of the CASE Risk Management Tools and served for a time as CASE Chair. He was a tremendous person who was committed to the structural engineering profession. He will be missed by all of us.

As I begin my two year term as CASE chair, I wanted to take this first opportunity to introduce a little of my background to you. I am a principal in a mid-size firm, about 40 people, that practices civil and structural engineering in the upper Midwest. Our practice is a rather “salt of the earth” type of practice. We design schools, courthouses, and jails, apartments, office buildings and warehouses. Along with those common project types, we also have had the opportunity to design some rather interesting structures including a South American Embassy and the first LEED® platinum building in the State of Minnesota. We also have done some unusual projects like moving a 90 year old vaudeville theater a block and a half so that it could be salvaged and then remodeled into a fine dance theater. But, in general, we are a typical firm that tries very hard to provide great service for our clients.

So why is it, then, that I am able to say that I am the third person from our firm to hold this position? I truly believe that it is because our firm has a culture and expectation of being involved. It is not sufficient or acceptable to simply pay your dues and be a member of a professional organization. Rather, you are expected to become involved and contribute to the activities of the organization. This active involvement not only allows you to contribute to your profession, it pays back many times over.

The first way that it pays back is in a better understanding of our profession. The first project that I was involved in with CASE, about 12 years ago, was to help write a commentary on the AISC *Code of Standard Practice*. To prepare for that effort, I needed to read through the entire document. Sure, I was already familiar with it and had read parts of it that I was interested in. But this time was different. I read through it making sure that I understood what it was saying. I also had to read it with an eye towards how my expectations during a project might differ from what was written in the *Code of Standard Practice* and just what the *Code of Standard Practice* expects from the design profession. Then, as we met and discussed the document, I more fully understood just how differently engineering is practiced in various parts of the country.

The second way involvement pays back is information sharing. At that first meeting, I was introduced to engineers with far more

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experience than I had. It was fascinating to listen to their experiences, and insights into the document and engineering practice. Over the years, I have been able to ask questions and gain insight about a variety of topics like hiring practices and bonuses and incentive programs. This insight has come from engineers in large and small firms and from all parts of the country. One of my fellow committee members made it a point to come to each meeting with a list of questions to which he wanted to get an answer. What a great way to maximize the benefit of your involvement!

Finally, this involvement pays back in networking and friendships. My involvement has allowed me to meet conscientious, committed engineers from around the country. I am glad to call many of these people my friends. I can count on this network of people for advice if I need to know about local construction practices for a project, if I need design advice about a system or technique with which I am not familiar, or if I might need consulting services on a project requiring expertise that our firm does not have.

So, how do you become involved? If you have an interest in business practice and risk management issues and your firm is an ACEC member, think about becoming involved in CASE. You can contact me or Heather Talbert at ACEC (htalbert@acec.org). If your firm is not already an ACEC member, contact your state ACEC organization and get the process started.

If you have an interest in national structural engineering issues such as licensing and building codes, become a member of your state Structural Engineering Association and become actively involved at the state and national level. If you have an interest in structural engineering standards or the other activities of ASCE's Structural Engineering Institute, become a member, find out about their committees and seek to join one that interests you.

There are many other ways for you to get involved. There is the old saying, “the world is run by those who show up.” Get involved, contribute to your profession and watch that involvement pay you back many times over. ■



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