

Editorial | Opportunities Abound

By Barry Arnold, S.E., SECB



Many superb opportunities are available to assist structural engineers in improving their skills, expanding their understanding, and increasing their efficiency and level of success. One problem our profession faces today is that too few engineers take advantage of these opportunities, and instead choose to languish in mediocrity.

An education is expensive in terms of both money spent and time expended. A wise professor told me at graduation that: "The worst was over in the fact that there would be no more homework or exams." With all due respect, my beloved professor was very wrong. I received a great education; however, I quickly learned that in college I only acquired about 10% of the knowledge I needed to survive and thrive as a practicing structural engineer. In addition, I continuously worked on 'homework' problems on every project and was regularly confronted with weekly examinations in the form of project deadlines.

While interviewing, one potential employer stated, "We don't expect you to know everything, but we do expect you to have a solid grasp of the basic ideas behind structural design, have the ability to rationally reason through a problem, and most important, be willing to start and embrace the next phase of your education." He was echoing the wise observation of Ralph Waldo Emerson when he stated, "The things taught in colleges and schools are not an education, but a means of education." In short, we should all be perpetual students and never stop seeking educational opportunities.

The end of our formal education is the beginning of an educational process that should continue throughout our professional career. Having spent so much time and money on both a formal education and getting an on-the-job education, it seems wise to want to supplement those with a regular and broad exposure to the latest methods, ideas, practices, code changes, and theory. Steven Covey, when describing the Habits of Highly Effective People, referred to this part of the educational process as "Sharpening the Saw."

The need to regularly sharpen the saw is mandated in our Code of Ethics and required by law in most states. In addition to the programs offered by the SEAs, educational opportunities are also offered by NCSEA, CASE, and SEI to assist the design professional in acquiring necessary skills and knowledge. NCSEA offers an Annual Conference and a Winter Leadership Forum (see page 36 for announcement), CASE/ACEC provides a fall and spring conference, and SEI supports the profession with its Structures Congress. Each of these organizations also offers a variety of useful publications and webinars; and, each of these

unique and diverse educational opportunities offers beneficial information ranging from how to design structures to how to effectively manage your business.

On my way home from the 2012 NCSEA Winter Institute, I was reading a newly purchased copy of NCSEA's *Guide to the Design of Diaphragms, Chords and Collectors* (a very valuable tool to have in your library). Another attendee questioned why, with over 20 years of design experience, I was reading the design guide. I explained, "I know how I design diaphragms and chords. Now I want to know how this author designs them." My education was and still is continuing.

Ed Allen, a respected structural engineer who retired 15 years ago, attends his membership meetings and participates in other seminars regularly. When asked why he continues to be involved, he stated, "How else am I going to keep up with all the changes that take place." Ed's education is continuing.

The educational process is a career and often times a life-long process. The sage Leonardo De Vinci was reported to have said, at eighty-seven years of age, "I'm still learning." That attitude of continuously wanting to educate himself explains why he was productive and valued throughout his career and life.

In favor of educating ourselves continually, Earl Nightingale notes: "The biggest mistake that you can make is to believe that you are working for somebody else. Job security is gone. The driving force of a career must come from the individual. Remember: Jobs are owned by the company, you own your career!" Embracing the educational opportunities that surround us is vital to a successful career. An investment in your continued education is an investment in yourself and your future.

If you are interested in exploring your potential and expanding your horizons, if you are interested in improving your business, if your saw has become dull and of limited use and is in need of a good sharpening, come join me and many of your peers at the NCSEA Winter Leadership Forum.

The format of the NCSEA Winter Institute was changed to a Winter Leadership Forum because NCSEA saw a need for structural engineers to pull together and talk about how they can all benefit by sharing the secrets of success, something that has become of greater importance with the current economy. Attendees will have an opportunity to discuss the current economy and devise strategies for succeeding in it. The attendees will also be able to share ideas with a variety of experienced professionals about charting a course for success in the future.

As a leader, your time is valuable; but so is your future. Investing in the Winter Leadership Forum is an investment in a brighter future. ■



Barry Arnold, S.E., SECB (barrya@arwengineers.com), is a Vice President at ARW Engineers in Ogden, Utah. He is a Past President of the Structural Engineers Association of Utah (SEAU), serves as the SEAU Delegate to NCSEA, and is the NCSEA Treasurer and a member of the NCSEA Licensing Committee.

