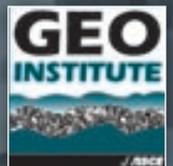


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GeoCurmudgeon

The World Is Run By Those Who Show Up

By John Bachner

Legal professionals must be important; a lot of them charge \$300-\$350 an hour and more. And by applying that metric, one would have to conclude that geoprofessionals are far less important, because many of them charge so much less. But that conclusion would be wrong: Geoprofessionals are vital to preserving humankind's sustainability on Earth, whereas attorneys...hmmmm: What *do* they do that makes their fees acceptable?

In fact, it's not so much what attorneys do as what people *perceive* they do. And as we all know, what people perceive to be their reality *is* their reality. So why is it that people perceive what attorneys do as being so much more valuable than what geoprofessionals do? Because attorneys know, as you should, too, that the world is run by those who show up...and you cannot show up unless others notice you're there. Sure, preserving our species is important. But look what happens when no one knows you're doing it.

Geoprofessionals have offered various explanations for not showing up, telling me and others that they cannot handle confrontation and the risk of rejection; that they don't like compromise; that they're not "wired" for public display; and so on. And we can also look at the way geoprofessionals are educated, which – for the most part – involves an exclusive focus on technical issues, with little regard for history, English, art, public speaking, etc.... the educational staples of most lawyers. (I've been told it's possible to go through four years of an engineering or science program without saying a single word in class other than "Present.")

"We need to change the way geoprofessionals are educated," a number of senior practitioners say. But not as many agree that almost an additional year of study is called for. And even fewer insist that geoprofessionals have more background in the humanities. So what does that mean?

In truth, it means nothing at all.

Well over 1,000 people have now gone through ASFE's Fundamentals of Professional Practice course for geoprofessional firms' rising stars; six months of remote study followed by a course-concluding 2½-day seminar. Speaking before small groups is an important element of the seminar and, for many of the younger participants, it's the first public-speaking experience of their careers. A lot of them are not very good at it. One such participant – let's call him Steve – was particularly upset with his poor



public-speaking performance. He asked me what he could do to improve and I suggested that he get involved in Toastmasters International. He did and, about seven years later, I was in his "neck of the woods" and gave him a call. "Joining Toastmasters was the best thing I ever did," he told me. "I learned how to get over my public-speaking fears and inhibitions, and now I really enjoy it. In fact, I do it every chance I get." And the more he does it, the more chances he gets to do it.

How important is that? It's huge, frankly, because speaking confidently in public is how people know you're there, showing up. It's what leaders do. Do you want society to think you're important? Speak up! Do you want to earn the kind of fees that important people command? Speak up! And be sure to do it via the organizations that comprise the public. Does that mean geoprofessional groups, like G-I? As confidence-building starts, sure; they comprise friendly enclaves of like-minded individuals whose compatible backgrounds help novice speakers feel comfortable. But graduate as quickly as you can to public groups whose members' common interest is something other than the same technological endeavors, so you can impress upon folks other than geoprofessionals what it is you and your cohorts really do. And that's pretty impressive stuff. After all, you help make human progress possible and, more and more, you are doing so while helping society preserve Earth's physical resources for use by future generations. Should that make you feel good about yourself? Absolutely. Should that give you the wherewithal to stand up in front of people and address them a confident, persuasive manner? It'll help, but you'll need more.

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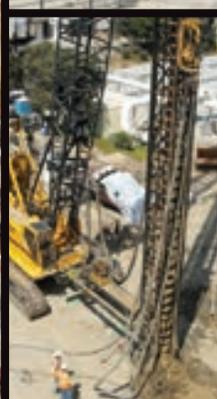
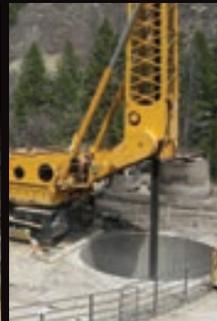
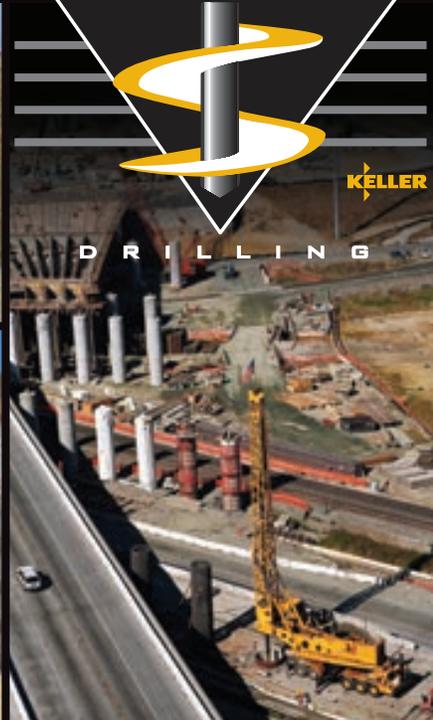
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First and foremost, you'll need to stop believing in flimsy excuses. Being able to speak well in public is not a genetic endowment. It is an acquired skill you hone through practice. (If Steve can do it, trust me: You can do it.) And when you gain self-confidence as a speaker and combine it with your self-confidence as custodian of our planet, you have something powerful to offer.

How long will it take before people start to realize that geoprofessionals are not only important, but even more important than lawyers? I have no clue. But I do know that, unless you and your peers are willing to invest the time and energy required to be able to speak confidently in public, it's never going to happen. Sure, lawyers may have an advantage by virtue of their education and by virtue of what some may say is a natural proclivity for humanistic involvement. But lawyers are not custodians of the planet. You are. And while many attorneys may be passionate about our environment and preserving it, passion doesn't get the job done. Nor does a law degree or passing a bar exam. But people aren't going to know that as long as geoprofessionals stay mum. And while you may agree with those sentiments, nodding one's head does nothing to improve the situation. Geoprofessionals need to show up. That means *you*. You need to believe that what you do is important, because it *is*. And you need to believe that, as a result, *you* are important, because *you are*. And then you need to get out of your comfort zone and show up, then let others know you're there. You can do that.

Speak up.

John P. Bachner is the executive vice president of ASFE, a not-for-profit association that provides programs, services, and materials that its members – geoprofessional firms – apply to achieve excellence in their business and professional practices. Contact John at john@asfe.org