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Geo-Strata

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Geo-Strata:
A Decade of Delivery

Levees At Risk

GeoCurmudgeon: It's All About YOU

By John P. Bachner

I'm angry. And YOU are why I'm angry, because YOU, being a geoprofessional, are a representative of all geoprofessionals. In and of itself, that's not a bad thing, of course, because geoprofessionals are so special.

Think about it. No other technoprofessionals are involved with so many types of projects. Skyscrapers. Shopping malls. Highways. Bridges. Tunnels. Harbors. Airports. Railroads. Monorails. Canals. Levees. Wastewater treatment systems. Geothermal-energy systems. Wind-energy systems. Solar-energy systems. Off-shore petroleum exploration. Coal mines. Gold mines. Landfills. Superfund sites. YOU name it, it has a geoprofessional component. No other technoprofessionals are that involved.

And think about the clients. The federal government. State governments. Local governments. Colleges and universities. Schools and churches, synagogues and mosques. Housing developers. Urban developers. Heavy industry. Light industry. Banks. Syndicates. Asset managers. P3s. It doesn't stop: Anybody and everybody need geoprofessional services to get the project done. Anybody and everybody need YOU.

So here YOU are, this technoprofessional Charles Atlas, and how do YOU behave? Like a 97-pound weakling. Instead of seeing the bright silver lining, YOU fixate on the cloud. YOU complain about lacking things YOU don't have only because YOU have made no real effort to acquire them. Don't YOU get it? Put in the effort and the prize is yours. Consider the facts.

When it comes to experience, YOU have it over all other technoprofessionals I know of, and not just in terms of projects and clients. Unlike others, YOU have to deal with the unknown day in and day out. The only comparable profession is meteorology, and that's not nearly as difficult. Besides, if a meteorologist says it won't rain tomorrow, but it does, what are YOU going to do about it? Sue? But what if your opinion is off – if settlement exceeds your prediction; if YOU fail to test for a contaminant that has no reason for

being there but is; if YOU say the contractor has but it hasn't, or hasn't but it has – you're in for it. What other technoprofessionals routinely seek a \$5,000 profit at the risk of a \$5 million claim? YOU do it every day, which is probably why some of the world's best-run technoprofessional firms are geoprofessional firms, or based on firms that started out in the geo-professions, demonstrating how geo-professionals' wealth of shared experience, garnered in an environment of high risk, pays off by making YOU even more special.

But none of that's good enough. Comparatively few geoprofessionals really achieve the heights, which is a shame given what YOU bring to the table...a sad but oft-told tale. I once knew a gifted pianist – *gifted* – who didn't like to practice. She wound up playing concerts on cruise ships. Not terrible, but The Love Boat is a far cry from Carnegie Hall. And that's YOU, and I'm angry about it because it's YOU to whom I've hitched my wagon for the better part of four decades, and I'd really appreciate your moving out of Low. YOU have so much opportunity milling about outside your

door, and there YOU are – with all your intellect, knowledge, experience, and capability – complaining about not getting enough respect; about not being invited to play Carnegie Hall. YOU want to be on the A list? Then start with this to-do list:

First, learn to write better, simply and directly, without ambiguity, so your written communication is unmistakably clear. You write more than any other professionals – not just technoprofessionals – and cannot afford ambiguity.

Second, learn to speak up in public. If doing so makes YOU feel uncomfortable, either force yourself to overcome your fear or enroll in Toastmasters. Do not succumb. Being able to speak confidently in public is something YOU must do to be regarded as a respected professional.

Third, learn more about your glorious professional heritage; your professional forebears who have made



civilization possible. Eagerly share your knowledge with others, especially young geoprofessionals on the way up.

And fourth, learn more about running a successful service-business enterprise, be that a project team or an entire organization, private-sector or public; for-profit or not. It means understanding contracts and the contract-formation process, risk management, insurance, and such, but most of all, it means understanding people, because the service business – even when it’s part of a government agency or university – is the people business. Learn how to delight clients, coworkers, colleagues, and peers and YOU will prosper through professionalism; YOU will function as a respected member of the team, if not its natural leader... because YOU are a geoprofessional.

It’s galling for me, knowing what YOU have and what YOU easily *could* have if only YOU would acquire the additional skills. All are as close as your willingness to do it.

Wake up! YOU have something no other people have or can have. But to take advantage of that specialness, YOU have to learn more. It’s worth it. Nothing will change until YOU change.

It’s all about YOU.

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Geo-Strata is interested in hearing from you. Please send your comments on this article to geo-strata@asce.org.

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