



# Geo-Strata

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## **GEOTECHNICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE**



# GeoCurmudgeon: Geoprofessionals of Lilliput, Unite!

By John P. Bachner

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I actually toyed with the idea of ending the column with the list, because the list says it all. But maybe not in a language everyone can understand. Allow me to translate.

First, engineers overlook their many commonalities, preferring instead to fixate on what makes them different. “In unity there is strength.” Architects, accountants, lawyers, physicians...they all get it. And, to advance their cause, each group has formed a giant organization to serve as its spokesperson, advocate, and bodyguard; not so much a Samson (he had a notable loss) as a Gulliver. And engineers? They evidently are content with being Lilliputians. Thus, while each engineering group may have a booming voice in its theater of operations, the sound each makes on the national stage is roughly equivalent to the croak of the largest frog in a tiny pond.

Second, look at what engineers do, then consider what would happen if they didn’t do it. Our built environment would consist of bird’s nests and rodent holes. Yes: Life would be a lot simpler. But meaner. And far less fulfilling for mankind.

Third, am I the only person who gets this? Don’t others realize that, without engineers, mankind would be no bet-

ter off today than it was a hundred-thousand years ago? You’re talking about huge, huge potential power. All squandered.

I can understand why technical specialization is necessary. But what about the engineering spokesperson, advocate, and bodyguard? You’d think, realizing what they could have, all engineers would be eager to unite to achieve the huge benefits they all would derive from sharing what they have in common. You’d think that each would be gladly sacrifice a little to create that giant friend. You’d think.

Fact: Every attempt to do it has met with failure. What does that say about engineers?

Don’t give up hope. A few organizations such as ASFE and the G-I are now trying to do the previously undoable, focusing not on engineering in general, but on those elements of engineering (in the old-fashioned, non-P.E., technoprosessional sense) that comprise the geoprosessions; a pond to be sure, but one that would unite a bunch of puddles. The goal, in large part, is creating the geoprosessional self-improvement needed to counter the commoditization and marginalization caused by decades of geoprosessional indifference and apathy.

Many geoprofessional organizations just can't seem to get off Lilliput. "Will we have to give money?" they ask. "And if we do, what are we gonna get? And if we're not going to get it during our current fiscal year, we're not interested."

Well, folks, this isn't about buy-sell. It's about gaining respect for geoprofessionals by helping them understand that performing a valued service involves a lot more than applying technology to solve problems. It's about being top-notch consultants; about applying professional principles to meet peoples' needs. Sometimes, all that's required to meet those needs is an empathetic nod rather than an equation.

No one is asking any group to relinquish its identity. But, we do need to unify on certain key points and move forward together to achieve a purpose we all need to share.

Consider what engineering could have. And because it doesn't have it, what it has lost and probably will never regain. Now consider what the geoprofessions could have and what they will attain if they all just start getting along and working together to achieve common goals and aspirations. Now this question: What are you going to do to help? Just turn the page?

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