



September/October 2013

# Geo-Strata

Tunneling...  
and more

**ALSO**  
2014 Geo-Congress Highlights



## Haste Makes Waste

**Y**ou've probably heard about Sandra A. "Sandy" Soyles, PE. A practitioner for 30 years, she's honed her skills to an almost surreal degree: She can do in two hours what lesser geo-professionals take six hours to do, and her findings and recommendations are always – not "almost always" – on target. You can therefore imagine how stunned Sandy was when her firm's CEO – Hardesty L. "Chipper" Wood, PE – summoned her to his office with a solemn "We need to talk."

"What's up?" Sandy asked in as jaunty a manner as she could muster to camouflage her dread.

"What's up, Sandy, is your performance."

"Have I done something wrong, Chipper? I'm always here on time. I work late when I have to, and I'm 75 percent billable."

"That's true, Sandy. I know all that."

"So, what's the problem?"

"Sandy, in all honesty, you're the finest geo-professional we have; the finest I know. You do in one hour what most of our people need a day to do. And I know your stuff is always right; always. Frankly, I think you're the best there is."

"So what's the problem?"

"Well, Sandy, we charge you out at \$140 an hour; the most we dare."

"Right."

"So, when you get something done in two hours, we charge \$280."

"Right."

"But when someone like Joey Crappe does it, it takes him eight hours at \$100 an hour; that's \$800 in revenue. And we don't pay you that much more than we pay Joey. We just can't afford to."

"I understand that, Chipper. But I'm loyal, you know that."

"I do know that, Sandy, I truly do. That's why I feel so bad about this, but we've got to let you go. You're just too good."

"Huh?"

"You're too good. You get stuff done too fast."

"But I'm sure some clients would be willing to pay more than \$140 an hour, Chipper."

"We tried that, Sandy. And the procurement guy at Amalgamated – Kopfman, or whatever..."

"Sheisskopf."

"Right. Sheisskopf. He laughed at me, Sandy. He laughed at me. I went to bat for you. Told him you were the best in the world, Sandy. **IN THE WORLD!**" Chipper thumped his index-fingertip on the desk for added emphasis. "**IN THE WORLD.** And you know what he did?"

"He laughed at you?"

"Yes. He laughed at me. So I assigned Crappe to it. He was totally lost. Took him two weeks. You could have done it in four hours, Sandy. Maybe three."



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"You're too good.  
You get stuff done too fast."

"But you were able to bill out Crappe for \$8,000, and..."

"More. \$10,500. He had to work a weekend."

"And I would have been \$600 tops."

"Right. You do X and we bill for \$600. Crappe does X and it's almost 20 times that. That's why we look at him as principal material. And you, Sandy; frankly, you make us look bad."

"What if I just slowed down?"

"I'd have an ethics problem with that, Sandy."

"Well, what if we did it on a flat-fee basis?"

"No one does flat-fee, Sandy: Time and materials is where it's at. Besides, you're part of a team in most cases. We couldn't flat-fee you but not the others."

"But you could do the whole project flat-fee. My speed and quality alone would give you plenty of cushion for the whole team, and the company would make a real nice profit."

"I told you we don't do it that way, Sandy."

"But you could try, Chipper. I bet there's lots of clients out there that would enjoy not having to go through invoices checking every nickel and dime. Doctors work on a flat-fee basis; so much per visit or so much per surgery. Accountants and lawyers do it, too, if you ask. So do plumbers and electricians. Auto mechanics have been flat-feeing for years. Why can't we?"

"Sandy, I said we don't do things that way, and I'm not about to change everything just for you."

"I see," Sandy said. "You're right, of course," not believing for a heartbeat that Chipper was even on the same coast as "right."

"I just want you to know we went out on a limb for you, Sandy. We did *everything* we could have. Have you given any thought about getting into management?"

Sandy looked at Chipper for what she hoped would be the last time. "I've thought about management," Sandy said, "but I'm afraid I'd do that too fast, too."

"No worries," Chipper said enthusiastically. "We don't do anything worth billing for."

#### AUTHOR

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