

Sandy Clay, P.E.

Clay Ltd.

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Dear Sandy:

Acknowledging your letter, herewith, I would like to express my eternal thanks and heartfelt appreciation. Per your request, enclosed please find my wordsmithed version. I know time was of the essence. However, due to my hectic schedule – to be honest, I was leading a seminar, urging geotechnical engineers to have zero tolerance for clichés – I was unable to respond earlier. But you’re just the man I wanted to hear from! (A blast from the past.) Your invitation to edit was an offer I could not refuse.

You asked if, by and large, utilization of clichés has a negative impact on geotechnical engineers’ image. A great question! You can’t keep that kind of thinking under your hat; it’s here and now. By the same token, though, it’s the kind of issue that would be categorically denied by those who can’t tell the forest for the trees. Let’s go cold turkey and talk heart-to-heart.

To a very real extent, and in a very real sense, geotechnical engineers’ common enemy is – and let’s give credit where credit is due – geotechnical engineers. They cry crocodile tears, complaining, “We’re all treated the same. We’re treated like commodities.” Well, they’ve got to face facts. They all seem to utilize the same, tired, dyed-in-the-wool phrases, and that makes them all sound the same. Truth be told, they seem to bend every effort to be the same, and then go into culture shock when people say they’re all cut from the same cloth (the lowest common denominator at work). Being perceived as commodities is their just desserts! What goes around comes around.

Geotechnical engineers have to pull together to effect change. They have to face up to reality, have a meeting of the minds, and put their money where their mouth is.

As you know full well, I, for one, am not wet behind the ears; I have a track record. I don't play my cards close to the chest; I wear my heart on my sleeve; the buck stops here; I don't beat around the bush, and that's probably why I'm not generally regarded as Mister Niceguy. I don't sit on my laurels, either, and – goodness knows – I try to practice what I preach, knowing that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. I don't mean to rock the boat, make waves, appear mean-spirited, be a rabble-rouser, rub salt in the wounds, or suggest it's my way or the highway. This commodity “stuff” is a grave concern, and, Sandy, let me tell you straight-up, man-to-man, being honest as the day is long, I wouldn't want this friendly fire to upset you for all the tea in China. Nonetheless, make no bones about this: You and your peers have need to wake up to the fact that you've got to get a handle on clichés. Yes: It's your God-given right to use them, but, when you do, you just run around in circles – vicious circles – and flirt with disaster. Maybe it's a sign of the times (where there's smoke, there's fire), but so be it. And you're hearing it from the horse's mouth (a legend in his own mind!).

But don't cry over spilt milk. Suck it up, Sandy, and take a stand. Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes; roll it down the alley and see how many pins fall: There's room for improvement. (It's most definitely not a six-of-one-and-a-half-dozen-of-the-other, half-full/half-empty situation.) A half-hearted effort won't do. There's a new gold standard in communication, Sandy, and that's good news. And I can grease the wheels and help you get to the promised land. Geotechnical engineers need to strike while the iron is hot; to be in on the ground floor (no pun intended), because that's where the silver lining is. There's a whole new ballgame out there. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, getting into it is a big challenge, but you've gone above and beyond the call of duty, as it were, before. Don't throw in the towel. As we all know, the bigger they are, the harder they fall, and we're not tilting at windmills. This is as real as it gets.

***CGEA Geogram No. 8***

I hope you hit this one out of the park, Sandy. I'll be waiting with bated breath, knowing that, when all is said and done, it's not over 'til the fat lady sings. In the final analysis, time heals all wounds.

Finally, in closing, let me note that, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call.