

PRESENTATION 2: *The Roles You Will Play*

Technical professionals do not operate in a vacuum. They operate within an organizational context (even when it's a one-person organization) and the organizational context functions within a societal context. Focusing solely on technical issues without considering the other roles you must play can get you into trouble, much as it got geotechnical engineers into trouble in the mid-1960s (so much trouble they were uninsurable).

To prosper through professionalism, you must learn the roles you play and will play, and how to play them well. Some of these roles are:

- *Reporter.* Answer the questions who, what, where, when, how, and why.
- *Writer.* Society expects professionals to be masters of the language they speak. You need to make directions unambiguously clear. You need to realize that your written proposals represent you. Keeping your language simple enhances your ability to say exactly what you mean to.
- *Editor.* Eliminate ambiguities.
- *Proofreader.* Proofreading is an art. It is not reading something slowly and carefully. Something as simple as an unnecessary comma can be costly (in one case, \$13 million).

- *Leader.* Be conscientious. Give praise to others. Managers manage things. Leaders lead people.
- *Manager.* If you cannot manage yourself, you can't manage anything else. Through effective management, you get it done on or ahead of schedule, at or below budget.
- *Supervisor.* Implement the management plan at the worker level.
- *Human Resources Manager* (from the point of view of those you supervise, when they ask about vacation policy, sick leave, and so on).
- *Performance Reviewer.* A difficult role for many technical professionals, but important for guidance and development: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- *Mentor.* Provide guidance.
- *Salesperson.* Professional selling is selling yourself. You've already done that: You have a job! Be yourself.

- *Marketer.* Learn about your market and your clients so you can offer the services most important to your clients.
- *Public Speaker.* A role you'll play when addressing public forums or even coworkers. The better you write, the easier it is.
- *Meeting Manager.* Learn the skills needed to make meetings (and related time) productive.
- *Interviewer* of job seekers, prospective team members, client representatives. Know where to interview, the types of questions to ask, etc.
- *Contractor Liaison.* Allows you to recommend those that you know want to do a good job and are capable of doing so, thus increasing client satisfaction while reducing your liability. Contractors can also give you referrals.

- *Colleague Liaison.* Individuals in your and related disciplines who will answer your questions when you return the favor.
- *Client Liaison.* Establish relationships that are mutually satisfying.
- *Government Liaison:* Understand where they are “coming from.”
- *Regulatory Specialist.* Know the regs!
- *Negotiator.* Of contracts, with supervisors and those you supervise.
- *Mediator.*
- *Diplomat.*

- *Risk Manager.* Using your experience and knowledge (e.g., gained from reading case histories) you can keep risks under control.
- *Insurance Coordinator.* Know the coverages in place. Know what is and is not covered.
- *Lender.* You extend credit with respect to the fee (collect after performance) and with respect to risk (“risk credit”); the residual risk you must accept because of project involvement. For example, if you do a layout of a residential subdivision, you owe a duty of care to everyone who purchases a lot in that subdivision.
- *Bill Collector.* You should be paid in 30 days. Collect effectively. Stay out of small-claims court; don’t use a lawyer. Either approach can result in a professional negligence claim against you.
- *Lawyer.* Contracts are legal documents. When you modify one, you are acting as a lawyer.

- *Accountant.* You need to be able to derive meaning from dollar and time “numbers” so you can manage a project well.