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R E S I D E N T ' S M E S S A G E

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Newspapers are running pieces on the rapidly changing faces of our communities; governments are planning intensification à la Hong Kong, and introducing bills to facilitate the integration of immigrants, as we drop populations the size of Mississauga into Canada every few years; and the influence of the car is now being debated as a global endangerment issue. Our own little world is vastly different than it was just 10 years ago, let alone decades ago, when many of our present practices were set. “Business as usual” is not good enough anymore.

Today, we are told that engineering enrolment is falling, and that the brightest students are not opting for engineering. Only a small proportion of engineering graduates actually go on to internship and licensure, and we have no data on where they go in their careers. Universities are responding and tricking-up engineering programs, by adding science courses that will facilitate entry into medicine, and business courses that mimic MBAs or prepare students for business or financial careers.

Some regulators see these programs as inferior. They don't get past our accreditation screens, leaving some graduates in never-never land, with the option of extensive exam programs set by regulators or foregoing licensure and creating their own fields of practice.

There is talk of pure engineering curricula, requiring engineering to be a five-year program, making a master's degree a minimum requirement for licensure for those who practise directly with the public, and for a more rigorous intern/residency requirement.

As a backdrop is the constant yearning for recognition by the public of our profession's contributions to society, concerns about leadership and direction, endless comparisons of the number of engineers in Canada per hectare to numbers in competitor countries, and constant predictions

of engineer shortages or anecdotal stories from the latest hot market, such as the oil patch. Add to this the never-ending strategic plan and governance impositions, usually seeming to hope that bureaucracy and process will provide the answers, and there is a noise level that can smother any opportunity for creativity and making decisions in a timely way.

It becomes abundantly clear that as leaders of a major profession, we need to get above this and to promote ideas, to act on the big picture, to form as well as lead the parade and, above all, to inspire, stimulate, motivate and convince others of the necessary objectives and the best ways of achieving them.

Suppose we look for the positive and the opportunities in our situations? Where universities are being creative in their marketplace reality, we can be supportive and

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creative in accepting engineering programs rich in diversity, by altering our accreditation screens. We can be more inclusive as a profession by granting all our engineering graduates a free shot at the professional practice exams, if they complete them within a year of graduation, and we can offer an engineering designation to everyone completing these exams. We already do this for experienced, international engineering graduates who lack Canadian experience.

In a technological world, it is a good thing that doctors and scientists and captains of industry have a good basic education in the practical science that is surely the heart of engineering degrees. If we are open and generous in welcoming them on a basic level in our profession, they will enrich our profession and our society. Recently, I met a doctor who had gone from engineering into medicine as an evolution of his

postgraduate studies in sciences. He proudly retains his membership in PEO, and sees himself as an engineer doctor. I was personally proud of his wish to belong to the family of engineers.

We can work with governments, not only to protect our profession from unwarranted intrusions, but in assisting in policy making on such issues as the environment, immigration, energy, and infrastructure. A major public relations outreach is no longer an option—it is a necessity. And we better get over our reticence.

We can recognize that many engineers will have to create their own jobs (we don't even know how many are now sole practitioners). Removing or making manageable Certificate of Authorization (C of A) constrictions and costs, and removing rather than increasing licensure obstacles unrelated to the real world, are obvious positive

needs. (See www.peo.on.ca for proposed directions on the C of A.)

We can get real on mobility, first by getting a Canada-wide registration designation, then by making NAFTA work on a continental basis, and then extending international agreements. (Again, see the PEO website for details of the objectives we pushed forward at the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers' recent annual general meeting.)

If, as engineers, we are the enablers of dreamers, we must be capable of achieving our own. A little optimism, a lot of leadership, and a commitment to inclusive, open, and proactive approaches to the real situation of our world today are surely more likely to succeed than piecemeal reaction on a crisis-management basis. If we approach our concerns in an open, visionary way, we can, in true engineering fashion, turn opportunities that can be grasped and explored into progress. It is what we do. 