

PRESIDENT BRINGS
NEW IDEAS
ABOUT WHAT LEADERSHIP MEANS



PEO'S FIRST
CONSECUTIVE
FEMALE PRESIDENT
LOOKS TO LEAD
A "NIMBLE" BUT
DELIBERATIVE
COUNCIL TO THE
NEXT ROUND OF
GOVERNANCE
AND REGULATORY
ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

By Michael Mastromatteo

The phrase “succession planning” leaps out from the campaign material prepared by Diane Freeman, P.Eng., FEC, in her 2008 bid for the PEO presidency.

Expressions like “succession planning,” “making the licence relevant” and “more effective self-regulation” tend to lose a little something in the ebb and flow of election campaigning. But in the case of Freeman, succession planning, at least, appears to have real meaning.

Some might think of the term as a convoluted way to describe a concept as simple as planning ahead. However, for governance aficionados, succession planning has come to describe a process for identifying and developing internal personnel and resources to fill important positions within a corporation.

Effective succession planning is also seen as a way to groom future leaders to take on more challenging roles within an organization.

Succession planning is not new to PEO, but it’s clearly something Freeman hopes to make more vivid. She’s keen to encourage leadership potential among professional colleagues, community partners, neighbours and within her own family.

“It’s always good to get out of your normal routine and learn from others,” Freeman said in a May 8 interview with *Engineering Dimensions*. “As far as succession planning is concerned, I don’t see it as my personal agenda, but I rather see it as an agenda for PEO that’s been on the docket for a long time. During the Chapter Leaders Conference that I ran back in 2005, succession planning was identified as a priority role that chapters can play related to council, and I want to continue to build on that work.”

Freeman was reluctant to discuss “personal” priorities as PEO president. Instead, she held out council, in consultation with licensed members, as the better forum for setting the PEO agenda.

“I don’t feel I have personal priorities, but I believe that council is on a path with regard to priorities, and so one of them is with respect to governance, and I think council is really looking to the broader licence holders for input on that. To me, this will constitute one piece of work that will be lasting.”

The newly minted president is making history of sorts by becoming the second woman in a row to lead Ontario’s engineering regulator. She hopes to build on the collaborative, consensus-building trend established by the outgoing president, Catherine Karakatsanis, MEng, P.Eng., FEC. It’s also apparent that she will use her status as the first consecutive female president to reach out to female engineers and other under-represented groups in the engineering profession.

Given the emphasis on consultation and wider stakeholder engagement, Freeman has a more nuanced appreciation for leadership at PEO.

ONE OF 29

“Like Past President Karakatsanis, I see myself as what I truly am, one vote of 29 members of council,” Freeman said in her remarks at the May 8 annual general meeting. “The president is an equal among equals, someone who understands that policy development should be pursued over the long term, year after year in a sustainable fashion, and based on the thoughtful consideration of all members of council.”

For Freeman, the decision to take a more active stand in policy development can be traced back to her initial involvement with PEO. As a newly licensed engineer in 1994, Freeman first became involved with education outreach programs at the chapter level. That experience sparked an interest in moving on to a higher level in terms of making policy decisions.

“I believe if you want to be part of policy decision making, you should put your name out and let people decide whether they think your ideas are going to bring value to the decision-making table,” Freeman said in a fall 2007 *Engineering Dimensions* profile. “That’s why I chose to run [for PEO council]. It’s why I want to stay on the executive. It’s why I strive to always come prepared to PEO council, and it’s why I encourage people in the chapter system to get more involved.”

The same interest in having a say in policy-making and problem solving animates Freeman at other levels. It inspired her run for City of Waterloo municipal council in 2006, and it led to her decision to found the Butterfly Learning Centre, a not-for-profit child-care facility in Waterloo. The centre now operates out of two locations in Waterloo, providing care to about 150 children. The decision to open the centre was based on the fact she felt “uncomfortable” with the child-care status quo in her community.

In November, Freeman described her non-traditional path to engineering to a group of female engineering students at the National Conference on Women in Engineering. To some observers, the presentation was a case of succession planning in action. To a highly engaged audience, Freeman encouraged future engineers to take on volunteer work, join boards of directors, or otherwise challenge themselves with decision-making and policy-setting exercises. In essence, she was calling on engineering students to make preparations for leadership roles down the road.

“I would like to encourage everyone here to consider accepting a role on a board of directors, if possible, as women bring unique perspectives to debating issues and strive to be consensus builders,” Freeman told the engineering students. “The methods by which women demonstrate leadership tend to be ones that do not threaten others, but rather encourage them to participate. It is because of these reasons that I believe women should step up and contribute in politics.”



As a further demonstration of her commitment to leadership development, Freeman is now working with Canada's military reservists to organize an August 4 training exercise for PEO chapter leaders at Canadian Forces Base Borden, north of Toronto.

Known as ExecuTrek, the sessions foster latent leadership potential by way of rigorous outdoor activity and related para-military exercises.

"The military and leadership go hand in hand, and there are opportunities to learn leadership from the military," Freeman says, "and I feel that we have a lot of folks that are engineers who do work in the reserves, so I feel it's an interesting blend to combine an increased understanding of the reservist with the opportunity to learn leadership skills."

The new PEO president, however, is interested in more than just leadership development. She fully buys into PEO's ambitious mission of becoming the global leader in professional self-regulation that responsibly improves the quality of life for all, and she hopes to further develop this Big Audacious Goal articulated by Past President Karakatsanis.

Freeman is also enthusiastic about the progress of PEO's involvement with Engineers Canada's Synergy Task Force, a project ushered in by her predecessor, and dedicated to nationwide recognition of the engineering licence.

COUNCIL PROGRESS

As to internal governance reforms, such as having PEO presidents serving for two years or longer, Freeman is of mixed opinion. She favours a "nimble council," but at the same time supports a more deliberate and consultative approach to policy formation.

"As we look at the governance models, in particular with regard to the role of the president, I haven't heard talk of changing the term from one to two years. I really believe that it may not be necessary, especially if at the end of all things, a decision to appoint a president from around the table (of sitting councillors) comes in. It really gets down to long-term planning and valuing the work you do in small pieces. When

you peer review it, at the end of the project you have a better outcome. If you're doing work like that, and you're appointing from within the council then, theoretically, you're going to have folks sitting around the table who have the corporate memory to move an item forward, and they have the support of council to do the job."

Given her views on peer review, it's no surprise that partnerships and consultation with other stakeholders are a priority for the new president.

In addition to Engineers Canada, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), other provincial regulators and professional associations, Freeman is keen to have PEO partner with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) as an additional channel for an engineering voice to be heard by provincial and municipal governments. Freeman has served as a director at AMO, an advocacy group promoting strong municipal government, since 2007.

"I am hoping that because of these various hats I wear, I can help to build and strengthen some partnerships," she says. "A partnership with AMO might work well in terms of our Government Liaison Program. Even though AMO is more of an advocacy body, I'd like to see those ties strengthened. And I would like to speak with OSPE to see if the society has an interest to be at the partnership table, because the advocacy side of the society and AMO might blend very well."

In addition, Freeman is especially supportive of PEO's recent partnership with Engineers Without Borders (EWB). "I believe this was an important agreement for PEO related to the relevance of the licence," Freeman said May 8 at the annual general meeting. "I believe that if we all approached engineering from the standpoint of contributing to the community in which we live, designing for the people who need us, creating to make our world a better place to live in, then members of the public at large may indeed have a much greater interest in identifying the relevance of the P.Eng. licence. EWB understands the important and relevant role that licensed professional engineers can make in the areas of technical design as well as social policy."

Despite what will certainly be a heavy workload over the next year, Freeman manages to find balance in her professional, personal and family life. Combining the PEO presidency, a City of Waterloo councillor position and a full-time position with Conestoga-Rovers & Associates is no easy task for a woman with a husband, two young children and two Old English Sheepdogs to nurture.

Freeman, in fact, has been stung in the past by insinuations that she neglects her family for the sake of her career and her political pursuits. Nothing could be further from the truth, she says: "I really fundamentally do not want people to think that I choose not to spend time with my family to do the things that I do. That is not where I balance my choices."

MENTORING AT HOME AND BEYOND

With her strong views on leadership and mentoring, Freeman sees her interaction with her two boys as another form of community building and leadership.

“My family values volunteerism and the opportunities it presents for them,” she says. “And when we’re together at different events, they are learning so much. My son wants to be an engineer. He is the next generation. If I can’t mentor him in volunteerism and leadership skills as he is growing up, then who will?”

It’s not surprising that family is an important component of Freeman’s outlook. She was raised by adoptive parents in a loving, stable environment. As an adult, she made the decision to seek out her biological mother, and the two sets of parents have since formed an extended family.

Freeman’s ability to find such a fine balance is no doubt abetted by the supportive stance of her employers at Conestoga-Rovers. It’s a case of a company sharing its human resources for the good of the profession and, in turn, for the benefit of the individual.

“Let’s cut to the chase here,” Freeman says, “consulting engineering is all about charging out intelligent capital and earning an income on it—and PEO is not getting a bill for this work. I’m very thankful that I work for the firm that I do. Not only does Conestoga-Rovers do it for PEO, they’ve also agreed that that intelligent capital brings value added to the decision-making table...At the end of all things, there are two things I don’t want to see: I don’t want to have an epitaph that only says ‘she was a good employee,’ nor do I want to finish my career with PEO and have no job to go back to.”

Ultimately, Freeman hopes her situation will inspire new kinds of PEO leaders in the next generation. Too often, she says, the PEO presidency is seen as a preserve of retired engineers who, at the end of their careers, look to give something back to the engineering profession. There’s no reason, she believes, why engineers in mid-career or earlier shouldn’t consider getting more involved with PEO, even at the highest levels.

“I think it’s high time that the licence holders realize it’s okay to be working full time and be president of PEO,” Freeman says.” There was a mindset that says the job entailed too much and you clearly couldn’t be working full time to do the job, and so there is the sense that once you were retired, there was time to give back to the profession. And because relevance of the licence is so fundamentally important to me, I believe that all licence holders, regardless of where they are in their careers, should feel as though giving and volunteering in the association, at whatever level, is possible—at any point in your career.” Σ

FAST FACTS ABOUT DIANE FREEMAN

It’s probably fair to say that Freeman is one of the more colourful PEO presidents to come along in a while.

An August 2008 article in Kitchener-Waterloo’s *Record* described her use of a new Vespa scooter to get around town.

“Sometimes Councillor Diane Freeman seems like a super hero, flying in on her bright red scooter and doing a quick costume change,” the article says.

The article also mentions that her two sons regard her as “the coolest mother” thanks to the quirky figure she cuts on the Vespa. According to the article, Freeman uses the scooter to attend city council meetings and events and to transport the boys to sporting or extracurricular activities.

As a committed air quality engineer, Freeman pointed out the reduced carbon footprint implications of her use of the low-emission two-wheeler.

Some other quick facts:

- born in Woodstock, ON
- BSc in civil engineering, University of Waterloo, 1992
- licensed by PEO in 1994
- several PEO volunteer and chapter committees
- invigilator for professional practice exam (Waterloo Centre) 1999 to present
- married to Peter Hicks, P.Eng.
- two sons: Scott, 14, and Adam, 11
- proud owner of two Old English Sheepdogs, Gracie and Bentley
- employed since 1992 at Conestoga-Rovers & Associates (air quality group)
- member of City of Waterloo council since 2006 (Ward 4)
- secretary, Air and Waste Management Association (Ontario section)
- director, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
- president, Butterfly Learning Centre in Waterloo
- awarded K-W Oktoberfest Rogers Woman of the Year (professional category, 2009)

