



Leadership succession

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I believe ongoing development of leadership is essential to the well being—even the survival—of engineering as a self-governing profession. Both PEO and OSPE require mechanisms to develop leaders from within their common memberships, and to provide for succession of their governance structures. History has proven repeatedly that organizations that do not invest in leadership development and succession suffer periods of weakness, ineffectiveness and strife.

Over the years, PEO has experienced difficulty finding suitable candidates willing to run for positions on chapter executives and on Council. This is particularly true of the position of President-elect, which requires recent Council experience. The pool of potential candidates for this position is small, given the reluctance of many Councillors to take on the extra responsibilities of the presidency. Acclamations and repeated recycling of candidates through leadership positions speak to the need for attention to leadership succession.

I contend that it's not enough to rely on our existing process of nominating people with leadership aspirations and (it is hoped) already-developed leadership qualities. Since the quality and quantity of such people varies naturally over time, doing so risks a leadership vacuum and inconsistency. While it is true that such candidates exist within any population, their time and talents tend to be in high demand in their workplaces and in other volunteer organizations.

Strong leaders dominate

Strong “natural” leaders can also dominate an organization, suppressing the development of colleagues, successors and cohesion within the leadership base.

Volunteer organizations like PEO should have mechanisms to attract and develop members with an interest in leading. Because these mechanisms must also not interfere with the democratic election process, such “leadership tracks” must remain largely infor-

mal. But they can nevertheless help ensure consistent leadership quality and cohesion.

Moreover, formal leadership development opportunities can be important incentives to volunteer for leadership, and are also valuable to volunteer leaders' employers, and to other organizations with which they volunteer. Indeed, this sort of development would have many practical benefits.

What do we mean by leadership development or “formation?” Leadership requires a fundamentally different skill set than that required for technical competence. This skill set includes the ability to:

- articulate principles and vision relative to an organization's objectives;
- strategize;
- organize group effort;
- build consensus;
- facilitate planning sessions/workshops;
- mediate and resolve conflict;
- influence and persuade, both privately and in public.

While every engineer would arguably benefit from developing such skills, they may not be essential for performing engineering work and protecting the public therein.

Besides acquiring leadership skills, leaders must immerse themselves in the “culture” and activities of an organization to become familiar with its issues, concerns and traditions. Within Ontario's engineering profession, this role has been performed most often by PEO's chapter and committee systems. It is probably safe to say, however, that these institutions have been more effective at perpetuating the corporate culture than at developing leadership skills, which have more often been left to chance.

What leadership development mechanisms should we have? Consider what background one needs to fulfil the role of President (or another executive office) effectively:

- a working knowledge of the *Professional Engineers Act*, Regulation 941/90, and *By-law No. 1*;

- familiarity with PEO's volunteer structure (chapters, regions, committees, etc.);
- familiarity with PEO's functions and staff organization;
- familiarity with the major issues facing the profession and PEO's plans to address them;
- skill at chairing meetings and facilitating workshops;
- ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing;
- ability to persuade and influence others;
- team leadership skills;
- conflict resolution skills.

This list may sound like a tall order, but everything on it can be learned by a motivated individual.

Leadership development

I am proposing that PEO develop a set of leadership development modules. Each module would comprise written background material with review questions to be self-studied—online at the participant's convenience—plus a half- or full-day workshop periodically at various locations. Participants would receive a leadership development credit and certificate upon completion of a module.

Suggested modules/topics:

- *the Professional Engineers Act, Regulation and By-law*
 - mandate and legal basis of our self-governing profession,
 - responsibilities and powers of PEO,
 - PEO's governance structures;
- *demand-side engineering legislation*
 - legislation requiring a P.Eng.,
 - emerging legal requirements for special qualifications,
 - additional areas where such legislation may be warranted,
 - regulatory incursions into PEO's legislated mandate;
- *chapter leadership*
 - roles and responsibilities of chapter executives,

continued on page 22

President's Message continued from page 3

- chapter activities that support PEO's strategic initiatives;
- *admission to the profession*
 - the admissions process,
 - requirements for licensure,
 - types of licence and registration;
- *complaints and discipline*
 - grounds for discipline,
 - complaints and discipline processes;
- *enforcement*
 - grounds for enforcement,
 - enforcement procedures;
- *accreditation of academic programs*
 - CEAB accreditation criteria and processes;
- *chairing a meeting*
 - rules of order,
 - techniques for successful meetings;
- *facilitating a workshop*
 - techniques for facilitating working group meetings,
 - brainstorming;
- *communication skills;*
- *the psychology of influence;*
- *team leadership;*
- *emotional intelligence;*
- *mediation and conflict resolution.*

Just a sample of the topics that could be included, many of the items on this list are from the realm of applied psychology, which is much more interesting and useful than some engineers might think. Some of the modules could introduce participants to subjects they might subsequently choose to study through course offerings at the university/college level.

I believe PEO should bear the costs of offering these programs to those who volunteer for leadership positions, as an investment in leadership succession. I can think of no greater reward for our dedicated volunteers than to provide them with professional development opportunities that will benefit their personal lives and professional careers. ❖