

## STANDING ON HIGHER GROUND



David Adams, P.Eng.  
President

I TRUST YOU ARE all enjoying the summer weather in all its vagaries—hot, cold and mostly wet. Obviously, some areas have not fared as well as others and it's time we engineers directed sufficient attention to the drastic changes in weather in the offing and determined how well our communities are equipped to handle them.

The promise of \$6.2 billion in planned federal expenditure for infrastructure renewal in Ontario, in addition to a \$3.1 billion commitment from the provincial government, will certainly help in coping with potential damage due to aging, weather and the environment.

I'm trusting the new Ontario Centre for Engineering and Public Policy, recently established at PEO, will prepare position papers investigating new technologies that address these potential infrastructure failures, as part of their broader mandate to study other environmental problems, innovative space and biomedical engineering activities, etc. New developments are obviously the way to provide jobs to replace those currently being lost in manufacturing.

Searching for such a real activity to ground the centre, yours truly recently went to Ottawa to investigate the building of an installation to gasify garbage, as one of these potential job sources. An initial review indicates this initiative has real potential, worthy of further study.

Following selection of our projects, we shall have to awaken the public mind to these new possibilities by determining the parameters of manufacturing operations at affordable cost and, at the same time, measuring the political interest and will to develop and retain such ventures in Canada.

Since last I wrote you, many have commented on my proposed Ten-point Work Plan developed to revitalize our profession. Most were pleased with what we intended to accomplish.

As a result of our June PEO council meeting, I am pleased to report that our discussions on improving council/committee relations was very positive, bringing forth many suggestions generated by small group discussions among committee chairs and councillors. It was pleasing to see

differences set aside in the practice of genuine humility by all concerned. We will finalize results at our September meeting.

Speaking of humility, several of you commented on my remarks regarding humility as being an essential ingredient in meaningful relationships—how we must grow smaller in our own estimation so that our purpose may grow larger.

Since that writing, a striking illustration of the effect true humility played in an unusual relationship has come to my attention. It happened at a concert performed by world-renowned pianist Jan Paderewski at Carnegie Hall in New York City. As all were being seated awaiting the musician to come on stage, the wait proved just too long for a young lad sitting in the audience. He spied the wonderfully large, shiny Steinway grand piano at centre stage and, feeling he could wait no longer, made his way to the front and up on stage. There he sat on the musician's bench and commenced to play “chopsticks.”

Backstage, Paderewski heard the tune, immediately put on his coat and approached the boy from behind. The audience held its breath. He quietly whispered to the lad, “Keep on playing.” Then, in an expression of true humility, he brought his own great talent to bear, improvising a counter melody to the boy's. By humbling himself, he made a lesser talent greater, produced music of great delight, and gave life to the situation.

On another front, PEO has put into effect a financial credit program to improve access to licensing by removing the financial burden of licence application for recent graduates and engineering graduates recently arrived in Canada. We want to ensure that every qualified person in the province is given the opportunity to gain a licence, succeed in engineering, and take full professional responsibility for their work.

I'll turn now to one of the current subjects under consideration at PEO, the multi-tiered licence, or the Comprehensive Licensing Process, as it will be known. Its implementation is designed to improve licensure uptake through a continuous engagement of each potential licensee. It involves the creation of a student

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member, graduate member, internship member and, finally, the present professional member (P.Eng.), each with corresponding academic and experience requirements.

Regarding the elimination of the EIT nomenclature, I think it's long overdue that we call those who fulfill their academic requirements graduate engineers. This is consistent with the titles given to newly graduated doctors and lawyers. Graduates will then be given recognition as engineers, ready for their next step—internship—on their way towards full practice.

Included in this study will be a number of additional classes of members, including temporary licensees, limited licensees, design specialists, etc. We will spell out these proposed changes on the PEO website and solicit your opinions on this approach to better serve the public and our members.

In analyzing these proposed changes as the next step in revitalizing our profession, may I suggest we all focus on embracing the spirit of "doing what we are called to do" as the regulator of professional engineering in Ontario? Just what does this entail for us? I believe it involves a three-step process in our thinking.

The first is one of admission that we are not there yet. Consider the following:

- many of us like to live in denial of the fact that we only regulate roughly one-third of those practising professional engineering;
- our initial and continuing education may not meet future global requirements;
- our standards of practice are not as well defined as they could be; and
- our internship program is based on years of practice rather than on knowledge gained for efficient professional operation.

In short, there is more to governing a profession than what's happening now. My friends, there can be no status quo in our purpose and plans. We must realize that time is going by, whether we adapt to relevant regulation or not. I believe we have no intention of falling into the two "last word" traps, namely: "we have always done it this way," and "we will keep doing it this way, expecting a different result."

The next step following admission that there is a problem is to make a decision to change direction. We must forget what is behind in order to move on. Of course, we treasure the "good stuff," past achievements, etc., however, progress always means leaving some baggage behind. If we don't, we will impede our forward motion and, like others who fail to move on, end up dwelling upon disappointments and resentment of change.

Let us deal with the past and close the door so that we can open a new one. Let us make a conscious decision to press on.

This necessitates the third step, the exercise of determination. Determination involves straining forwards, towards what is

ahead, facilitated by a proper perspective of what lies ahead. We must set progress as a goal and build for the long haul...really nothing new for us engineers.

Admission, decision and determination are the steps and the Comprehensive Licensing Process is the first specific goal we need to accomplish to set our direction and get us on our way. In the Ten-point Work Plan we have the further quantifiable, realizable vision, so let's make it happen!

While composed in another context, the words of the great song *Higher Ground* by Johnson Oatman intrinsically expresses our professional challenge at PEO.

"I'm pressing on the upward way,  
New heights I'm gaining every day,  
Still praying as I'm onward bound,  
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

Thank you. Σ