

[LETTERS]



A ROTTEN PROCESS?

I have to admit to being somewhat confused by Pat Quinn, P.Eng., FEC, two-time PEO president's article ("Injustice for one is injustice for all," *Engineering Dimensions*, July/August 2010, p. 58). Reading between the lines and from the little I know of the cases cited, I get the impression that Quinn believes none of these should have happened. I do not see how a few cases that perhaps were groundless making it to a hearing makes the whole process rotten.

I would be much more concerned about cases where harm was done to the complainant but the case was dismissed, or the hearing found the engineer not incompetent or not in misconduct. In my casual reading of Gazette, I get the impression that this is indeed what is happening, too often. Too many times,

the penalty, if there is one, is a minor slap on the wrist, a "tsk tsk" and a request by the panel to the engineer to never do it again. It is also my impression that council, especially past presidents, believes it is impossible for P.Engs to be incompetent and do intervene or otherwise influence the Discipline Committee (DC). This is what truly makes the process rotten and tests the self-regulation aspect of PEO.

(My bias: I have never been before the DC. I know only two engineers who have—and both cases were groundless—and was employed by a company that was done harm by a P.Eng. who was truly incompetent but we decided the hassle was not worth it.)

David Moffat, P.Eng.
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opinions and policies of the association, nor does the association assume responsibility for the opinions expressed.

All letters pertaining to a current PEO issue are also forwarded to the appropriate committee for information.

Address letters to jcoombes@peo.on.ca.

PRESIDENT SEEMS TO SUPPORT DISCRIMINATION

I read with surprise and disappointment our newly elected president's avowed intention of supporting the concept of sexual discrimination ("Women in leadership," *Engineering Dimensions*, July/August 2010, p. 3). However, her suggestion that our profession should support sexual or any other type of discrimination greatly concerned me. This is antithetical to our long and proud history of objectivity, neutrality and fairness. In fact, it calls into question our claim to professional status.

Her first sentence—"At a time when women represent only 10 per cent of all professional engineers in Canada, there is a ray of light in the effort to become a more inclusive profession"—clearly implies that we have been excluding women from our profession. In the more than 50 years I have been a member, I have no recollection of ever having witnessed one case of sexual discrimination with respect to employment, membership, or appointment to office in the association. Furthermore, having been on staff, I am confident if there had been, I would have heard of such a thing.

Like it or not, there are basic differences between the male brain and the female brain. This is the basic reason that there are more women in nursing than men, and there are more men in engineering than women. If there is any sexual discrimination in those professions it is due to the choice of training by those who subsequently apply for membership.

I encouraged my daughters to continue their education, but I made no effort to direct their choice. An example of how I influenced them can show this.

When, as a teenager, one of my daughters learned about the Block Parent program, she came to me and said: "This sounds like a good idea, Dad. Why don't you organize it here?"

My response was: "No, it's your idea, so if you want it, you do it. I'll support you." I was very pleased, and not in the slightest surprised when she did it—entirely on her own. She subsequently chose her own course and subjects at university. If she had chosen engineering, I would have supported her, but she made an arts choice, and I supported her.

Discrimination on the basis of anything other than ability is immoral, even if it is, like some governmental programs, legal.

William W. Hastings, P.Eng., Aurora, ON



DISCIPLINE PROCESS OVERHAUL

The Summary of Decision and Reasons from a hearing dated November 3, 2008 is disturbing (*Engineering Dimensions*, July/August 2010, p. 45). From the information reported in *Gazette*, it would appear that the heavy hand of the PEO discipline process was brought to bear on a private business matter, not in the public domain, where an engineer used some inappropriate language. Engineers are human and do occasionally use inappropriate language, but surely this should not be a matter for the PEO Discipline Committee. The association filed a very comprehensive list of allegations, and then a significant number of the allegations were not pursued; this could appear as if the Discipline Committee was perhaps not acting in a fully professional manner. Patrick Quinn's article in the same issue of *Engineering Dimensions* (p. 58) is very timely. PEO's discipline process does need a complete overhaul if PEO is to be representative of a global leader in regulators.

David Eastwood, P.Eng., Woodlawn, ON

ENGINEERS BY COLOUR

I was surprised to read in the July/August 2010 *Engineering Dimensions* that a National Society for Black Engineers (NSBE) existed in the USA, its first convention outside the USA was held in Canada, and that it is now enrolling Canadian members ("Toronto conference a first for black engineers group," p. 22).

The horrors of slavery and the oppression of negroes in the USA and, to a lesser extent in Canada, are well-known to most of us. In the 58 years I have lived in Canada, there has been a huge influx of immigrants of all colours and racial origin with a corresponding relaxing of racial bigotry within our borders.

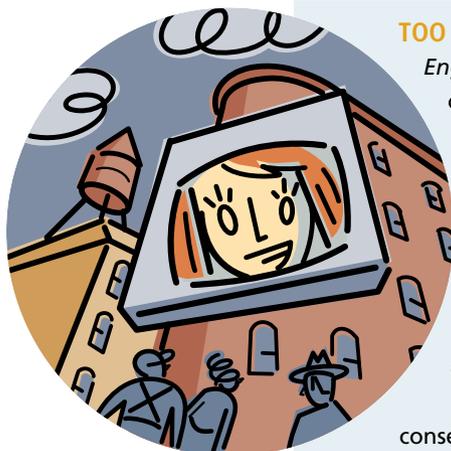
Did the NSBE decide to have their convention in Toronto because we have a few all-black schools in the city?

The difficulty I have with the NSBE is the word "black." When applying for membership by mail does the applicant have to enclose a photograph? Will he/she perhaps be told, "sorry you are not black enough for membership"? I'll wager that PEO doesn't keep track of colour and has no knowledge of the percentage of its black members. Should we be concerned about losing members to the NSBE?

I am surprised that engineers would organize themselves on the basis of colour when today's workplace and the top soccer and rugby teams are racially mixed as are the audiences. Black and white jazz musicians have been playing together for decades. Music festivals are enjoyed by everyone—white, black and yellow—so why do black engineers have to separate themselves?

Perhaps someone could explain this to old, retired members like me who, perhaps mistakenly, think they are with the times.

John Bonfield, P.Eng., Brantford, ON



TOO MUCH FOCUS ON WOMEN

Engineering Dimensions is a publication of the profession, but issue after issue, I suggest, has too much focus on the subject of women in engineering.

I have no doubt the intent is noble and is to advance the progress of women in engineering, since it's not that long ago that there were real impediments in this and other professions.

I wonder, however, if the unintended consequence of all this focus is actually to discourage young women from entering the profession. The sheer volume of articles singling out women engineers may be suggesting there is a problem within the profession. But, having been in the engineering community in Ontario for more

than 20 years, I do not see such a problem on any significant level.

On the contrary, I am aware of no distinction between women and men in terms of engineering competence or career opportunity. The only time it enters my mind is when I open up my latest copy of *Engineering Dimensions*.

This is not to take away from any of the efforts of those who champion the advancement of women in engineering, as their work is no doubt why we enjoy such an equitable professional environment. My only point is that the frontline publication of the profession should be mandated to the profession in general and focus on any specific demographic should be limited.

Garry Kinson, P.Eng., Grimsby, ON