



THIRD TIME MAY BE THE CHARM

FOR DAVID ADAMS

By MICHAEL MASTROMATTEO



Drawing from the hard-won experience of his two previous terms, David Adams, P.Eng., FEC, returns to the president's office as a self-described champion of grassroots thinking at PEO. He wants to hear from members across the province on how best to attend to PEO's regulatory and licensing matters.

In 1970, when former prime minister Pierre Trudeau was deeply embroiled in the FLQ crisis, he created a media stir with his “Just watch me” response to a question from a reporter about how far he was willing to go to put down insurrection and restore order.

Fast forward some 44 years and we have PEO President David Adams, P.Eng., FEC, offering a similarly daring response to some questions.

Admittedly, the setting and circumstances in Adams' case aren't as portentous as they were in Trudeau's time, but perhaps the spirit is somewhat the same.

In mulling over a series of questions about his objectives for the 2014-2015 term as PEO president, Adams said the following: “Regarding these provocative questions, I will deal with them through circumstances throughout the year.”

In other words, it appears Adams would prefer to let his actions do the talking as he takes up PEO's leadership reins for the third time.

Adams also offers a bit of biblical wisdom as principles for the coming term (see sidebar). The principles no doubt stem from Adams' experience as a lay preacher with the Gideon (Bible distribution) society, and from his past work with a Hanover, Ontario, evangelical radio talk show—*Take God's word for it*.

But all reticence aside, Adams seems a bit more conciliatory and upbeat as he begins his third kick at the PEO leadership can.

He still feels some of the glow from presiding over the purchase of PEO's new headquarters building during his first term as president. Although it was a team of PEO staff and volunteers who brought the purchase to fruition, Adams is proud that it happened on his watch, when he gained a majority vote in council to purchase 40 Sheppard West. “I regard that as an achievement,” he says, adding that the move has already provided the regulator with significant occupancy cost savings and 50,000 square feet of rental income.

His second presidential term, however, ended under a cloud in 2012 with Adams immersed in controversies with the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), council and even PEO itself, the last problem stemming from Adams' support of a former council member who resigned, revoked his resignation, and ultimately was prevented from returning to his council position.

Adams, who believes there was precedent for reinstatement of a council member, brought the matter for a judicial review in Ontario court, which later ruled in favour of the PEO position. In Adams' understanding, the court reasoned that, because PEO is a corporation without share capital, a director's resignation is effective when given. The court awarded PEO a portion of the court costs.

The parties have since settled amicably with the condition that the details not be disclosed.

It was somewhat of a rocky period for Ontario's engineering community to have the regulator at loggerheads with the advocacy body, and to have a president at loggerheads with council. Looking back, Adams says the PEO-OSPE contretemps grew out of his concerns about OSPE having neither the membership numbers nor the financial clout to take on the expanded advocacy program it had proposed. Adams even suggested PEO members contribute a portion of their annual fees—by way of limited memberships in OSPE—to help it take up its additional duties. However, the limited membership idea was rejected by OSPE and the PEO-OSPE stalemate grew more intense.

The dust seems to have settled over the last 24 months, however, and a resilient Adams is ready to try a new tack for OSPE, including discussing the possibility of OSPE offering services under contract to PEO.

In the 2012 PEO elections, Adams defeated challengers Paul Ballantyne, P.Eng., FEC, George Comrie, P.Eng., FEC, and Corneliu Chisu, P.Eng., FEC, to become president-elect for 2013 (president in 2014). Considering the way his second term ended, it was an eyebrow-raising victory to say the least. Adams' election message was simple: Elect a president active in assisting members in protecting the public.

And Adams appears to have learned a few lessons on his road back to the president's office. "In the past, I have not been the favourite of council," Adams admits. "Part of that comes from my 'line' background where I tell more than I ask. When you're running a shop, or sent as a troubleshooter abroad, employers expect you to come up with answers, and they expect the problems to be rectified. This requires a different approach than seeking 30 opinions and then trying to reach consensus. So one's background does have a lot to do with it. Now, I fully realize that you have to try and fulfill what they want from you."

Adams also referred to his management style during the April 26 annual general meeting, adding that charges he's autocratic could be the result of an executive way of running a corporation.

"I've been accused of being autocratic and I suppose it's because of my many years in line management—where I decided to do something, and we put it forward," he said at the annual meeting. At the same time, Adams recognizes the old management style of leadership isn't applicable in an organization that relies a great deal on the work of volunteers.

"This is not the way council should work and I've finally figured this out," he says.

It's a promising attitude to begin a third presidency. Adams believes he has significant support among "grassroots" PEO members, despite his past differences with OSPE and some fellow council members.

A definite plus for Adams is the arrival of Registrar Gerard McDonald, P.Eng., on the PEO scene. Adams was intimately involved in the recruitment process for a new registrar, and he's certain PEO made a good choice. "I will be working very closely with Gerard McDonald," he says, "more so than it seemed I was able to do with some of the others. Gerard seeks my opinion, and is genuinely interested in some of the things I have to say."

While he might now shy away from imposing personal priorities, Adams has a list of issues he would like to see emphasized during 2014-2015. He developed the list during a spring meeting with members of Adams' home Georgian Bay PEO Chapter (see President's Message, *Engineering Dimensions*, May/June 2014, p. 3).

In his grassroots-emphasizing way, Adams hopes to take on a "servant-style" presidency that exceeds stakeholder expectations in day-to-day operation. He also takes great pains to invite input and suggestion, "both positive and negative," from members at large as he and council set out to tackle regulatory and licensing business during his term.

Adams also encourages members to challenge his ideas and proposals, and to present their own suggestions for consideration by council.

"I'm a grassroots kind of person, as you know," Adams says. "And that's why people are very confused when I get re-elected, because they don't know where this support is coming from. But I know where it's coming from. It's coming from the members and they want things done." Σ

STATE OF GRACE AND HOW TO FIND IT

Here is President Adams' message in response to 10 "provocative" questions submitted by *Engineering Dimensions*. It may require some reading between the lines, but it suggests notes of providence, humility and conciliation for the three-time president:

"Let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranate bud forth."
—Song of Solomon 7:12, King James Bible

"Be not then discouraged, you who discern in yourselves but small measures of grace; look on your wants and imperfections so as to grow in grace, and not be content with any measure. But look not on the small beginnings in grace as discouragement to you.

"When you see a great oak in a field, you may say this great tree was once but a small acorn. Say to your soul, 'Though I am but weak, yet I shall be strong.' A grain of mustard seed may grow a great tree.

"Content not yourself with small measures of grace. A little of the world will not content you. In the womb a foot contents us, three feet in the cradle, and seven feet in the grave. But between the cradle and the grave, a whole world will not content us; and shall a little grace content us?"

—Christopher Love, *Weak measures of grace in Christians*