

MOVING FORWARD IN A HOST OF WAYS

By Bob Dony, PhD, P.Eng., F.IEE, FEC



As I write this first President's Message column, I am still humbled and grateful for the support of the members and my colleagues in allowing me the honour and privilege to serve as the 98th president of the association.

When I stood for election last year, I used the phrase "Moving forward for a stronger profession" to sum up my perspectives on how I wish to focus my efforts in the coming year. This emphasis on the future of the profession is a direct result of my full-time job as an engineering professor. Being surrounded by the future generation of engineering practitioners continually reminds me that, really, it is their profession that we should be working for. And not only does this come from my professional life, but closer to home, literally, as I am the proud father of two engineering interns (EITs), Lynn Dony, EIT, and John Dony, EIT, as well as Greg Dony, a student member.

So, what does their profession look like? It is certainly different than the one I entered when I graduated in 1986 with my degree in systems design engineering. At that time, such a non-traditional program was very much the exception to the classical engineering disciplines of the day. Today, there are over 100 differently named engineering programs in Canada that have been accredited by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB). The old framework of discrete engineering disciplines is now simply obsolete. Instead, there is a continuum of engineering competencies and scopes of practice, a spectrum that ranges from civil engineering to biomedical engineering, and everything in between. This is a world of makerspaces, hackathons, unicorns and self-driving cars. How do we take a regulatory framework that, some would argue, was designed for 19th-century technology and adapt it to today's reality?

There are a few areas that I plan to focus on during the year to help us move forward.

INNOVATIVE EDUCATION

Most new licence holders gain their academic requirements for licensure through an engineering program accredited by the CEAB. As a member of the CEAB myself, I am very proud of its over 50-year history of accrediting engineering programs in Canada. The criteria have allowed the universities—and now colleges—to develop innovative curricula and teaching methods. The final product has been an outstanding engineering graduate who is recognized as world-class across the globe. However, we need to ensure that educators continue to have room to innovate and meet the challenges of today's professional environment on one hand, while maintaining the technical rigour we require as a regulator on the other. There have been recent discussions between the national deans of engineering and Engineers

Canada about accreditation and its evolution. It is imperative that the requirements of PEO, as Ontario's engineering regulator, are still met if any changes are contemplated.

To this end, I am organizing a workshop between PEO and the Ontario deans of engineering in May to examine the future evolution of the accreditation system. It will be a unique opportunity for the provincial educators and regulator to have a direct face-to-face discussion. It is also an opportunity for us to take a leadership role, especially considering that Ontario graduates make up half of engineering students nationally.

LEADERSHIP RENEWAL

Because we have the privilege of belonging to a self-governing profession, it is we, the members of the profession, who must provide the leadership to chart a new path forward for the profession. To succeed, we must ensure that diverse voices are present at all levels of discussion within PEO and we must embrace a culture of change as part of our core DNA. Succession planning and renewal are key to make sure fresh perspectives are brought into the organization. I will continue to support the work of the Human Resources Committee to have all PEO committees develop and implement succession and renewal plans. Even at the top—PEO council—there is much work to be done. The members' motions concerning term limits at the 2015 AGM spoke to this issue directly. The resulting council-appointed Council Term Limits Task Force presented its report to council in March and will present the details of their final recommendations in June.

I firmly believe the profession is bigger than any one of us. It is the responsibility of those of us who take on leadership roles to step aside and encourage new people to take our places. Personally, once my term is up on council, I will devote my time to

renewal, encouraging new voices to join the conversation—much like former president Walter Bilanski, PhD, P.Eng., FEC, did almost 20 years ago when he asked me to join the Engineering Disciplines Task Group examining the role of PEO in software engineering.

While we are encouraging new voices to enter the conversation, we must make sure it is a diverse set that reflects not just our profession, but society as a whole. Engineering as a profession has had a challenging history in trying to achieve gender equity. I want to explore initiatives to improve the gender balance of our volunteer leadership base. But, can we go beyond just reflecting the current balance within the profession and take a leadership role by setting more progressive goals? For example, can we exceed Engineers Canada's "30 by 30" goal of raising the percentage of newly licensed women engineers to 30 per cent by the year 2030 for our own leadership? This past election saw three women successfully elected of the seven contested positions. While these results are very encouraging, there is still much to do.



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PROTECTING SELF-REGULATION

The expectations of society on whose behalf we serve has also changed over the years. Today's public rightly demands much more transparency in how the professions govern themselves. Past President George Comrie, P.Eng., FEC, has spoken of the "contract" between the public and the profession. We gain the privilege of self-regulation in exchange for the obligation to protect the public as our primary function. This arrangement is increasingly under scrutiny for professions in general. With this in mind, we are very disappointed by the government's about-face on the repeal of section 12(3)(a) of the *Professional Engineers Act*, the industrial exception, whose repeal was dealt a death knell in March by the passing of the so-called *Burden Reduction Act*. Doctors are concerned about the erosion of their self-governing powers with Bill 87, *Protecting Patients Act*. And the placing of the Quebec regulator, l'Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec (OIQ), into trusteeship last year is yet another blow to self-regulation. Understanding the need for more transparency and taking a proactive response is, I believe,

the best approach. The introduction of PEO's Practice Evaluation and Knowledge (PEAK) program is an excellent demonstration to the public at large of our desire to regulate the profession openly and transparently. I am fully in support of the program that was launched in March and will work to support its further evolution as we gain more experience with it over the coming year.

Again, I wish to express my gratitude to those members of the profession who put their trust in me. And I would like to thank Past President Comrie for his year of service as president. I am looking forward to the challenges ahead, working diligently to fulfill my obligations as your president. There is much I am looking forward to: working with the new council and with our various partners in the engineering profession, such as the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), Consulting Engineers of Ontario (CEO), and the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists (OACETT), and meeting many of you at chapter events and other engineering activities across the province, and hearing all your diverse views on the myriad issues facing our profession. The strength of our profession rests on the shoulders of its over 80,000 members. And as a self-governing profession with over 1000 volunteers across the province, I look forward to "crowd sourcing" a path together to move this great profession of ours forward for the next generation of practitioners. **e**