



## Who's Succeeding You?

Late last year, I was invited to a client function hosted by a large multi-disciplinary firm in Traralgon. The evening was an opportunity for this firm to promote its expertise and capabilities to a wide range of Gippsland based organisations, including existing and potential clients. The culmination of the function was a very public “changing of the guard” from the departing Engineering Manager to the new incumbent, a young engineer assuming his first management position.

The evening was interesting for the excellent way in which this firm promoted its predominantly engineering skills to the wider community and also succession within the local branch. Naturally, I attempted to draw some comparisons to our own surveying profession both in the promotion of our skills and in the way in which we handle succession and develop our future leaders and I think it is fair to say that we still have much to do.

In my experience, surveyors and surveying firms have been collectively poor at succession planning. Does your firm or department currently have a succession plan? Who are you currently grooming to take over a senior position within your practice and by what criteria do you select such candidates? Over recent times, with the aging of our profession, a number of smaller firms have opted to merge with other surveying companies. It could be argued that this has, in part, been necessary due to no succession planning and no genuine willingness to promote the younger members of our profession.

Obviously, a succession plan is one thing, but to have bright young surveyors coming up through the ranks to take the next step is also a crucial part of the equation. The recent news of a drop in the enrolment numbers of students at RMIT is a frightening development and is perhaps a symptom of the message just not getting out there, not only in the skill set that we offer the community and industry, but in attracting younger people to our profession.

The efforts of many surveyors over recent years in promoting surveying as a career, whether through the attendance at secondary school career days or by hosting work experience students, have had a degree of success. Such work must be continued, but be more organised so that full exposure to all secondary schools is achieved and not in the ad-hoc manner that has occurred in the past. It is hoped that the current endeavours of a combined approach by ISV / SSI / ACSV and the Universities in approaching as many schools as possible may have a greater impact in the immediate future.

I don't profess to have the magic answers in promoting our profession, but I did read with interest the success of the New Zealand approach of targeting rural students into surveying courses. From my own experiences, the logic in doing this makes eminent sense. During my time at RMIT, the number of country students undertaking the degree course was far in excess of what could be considered a proportionate percentage to city students. In fact, during this period of the late 1980's, there were no less than seven students studying surveying at RMIT and Melbourne Uni who originally hailed from my home town of Warragul. The attraction of working outdoors in an academically challenging profession is an obvious attraction to many country students. It was perhaps also in no small way due to the efforts of the local Licensed Surveyor Ian Worth, who made regular visits to the local high school to promote surveying as a worthwhile profession to enter into. Even back in the early 1980's school visits did work!

Having now worked in a number of practices in rural areas over the past 18 years, I observe that a common theme during this time has been the difficulty in attracting surveying graduates. This has been magnified in recent years by the continuing economic prosperity in the city regions, not to mention the resources boom in Western Australia. The lack of human resources has stretched many country practices to capacity and indications are that this will not change in the foreseeable future. So where do we go from here? It is one of the hardest questions facing our profession at the moment.

There is little doubt that a collective approach must be taken. Every regional surveyor, not to mention our city cousins, needs to put their hand up and volunteer their time to visit local schools **every** year. Make it your business to become acquainted with the local careers advisors; take an active interest in presenting career displays; do what Ian Worth used to do and visit some Year 10 and Year 11 classes. Actively encourage work experience students to your workplace by asking them to come. Be a salesman as we have a great product to sell. Put on your recruiting hat. Tell them what a great career awaits them and that we need them now! When is the last time you did any of these things? Don't leave it up to someone else.

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