



ENGINEERS
AUSTRALIA
Tasmania Division
Joint CELM/YEAT Event

ENGINEERING LEADERSHIP BREAKFAST

“BE THE CHANGE”

Wednesday, 17 February 2010

7.45am to 9.00am

Mawson’s Waterside Pavilion, Hobart

SPEAKER’S NOTES



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Sinclair Knight Merz Pty Ltd**

2010 YEAR OF
**ENGINEERING
LEADERSHIP**



ENGINEERS
AUSTRALIA

Be the Change

Presentation at Mawson's Waterside Pavilion, Hobart on Wednesday, 17 February 2010,

0745hrs for launch of the Year of Engineering Leadership. Hosted by YEAT and CELM.

I promise to be brief.

Engineers Australia has nominated 2010 to be the Year of Engineering Leadership and our National President has set the following four key messages to be promoted during the year:

1. Members of the engineering team are leaders who provide sustainable and innovative solutions to society's challenges
2. Engineering should be a desired profession for leaders of the future
3. Engineers Australia fosters and develops engineering leaders throughout all stages of their careers
4. As members of the engineering team, we should value and be proud of being part of the engineering profession

I would like to take up those leadership themes this morning with a challenge to each one of us to be the change we want to see in this world. Each one of **you** to be the change **you** want to see around you.

It is sometimes hinted at in hushed and sullen tones when two to three engineers gather together to discuss their lot that engineers are under recognised and undervalued by society. And whilst I think that this is changing as the public come to better recognise the role of the engineering team what is perhaps more significant is the fact that as members of the profession, we too often under value the contribution we can make and the ways in which we can make it.

It is clear that through the application of our technical skills we can, and do, provide sustainable and innovative solutions to society's challenges but I am talking about more than that because if that is all that we see our contribution as being then we have seriously underestimated what it is we have to offer and we would have ignored many of the leadership roles that we are called undertake.

Engineering is more than just the application of technical skills to solve technical problems. If I was asked to characterise a member of the engineering team it would be:

- A problem solver
- Someone with a disciplined and analytical mind
- Someone who can create order from chaos (this is after all the space in which we consistently operate)
- If you are going to be a successful engineer you have to not only be able to solve problems but you have to be able to clearly articulate your solution often in both written and verbal form. You need to be a communicator, an advocate.

So... problem solver, disciplined and analytical mind, order from chaos, a communicator, an advocate...a leader.

Why is it that we so often give up this space to others in the mistaken belief that this is not what we are called upon to do, that our solution space is limited to the technical? If this is how we have seen ourselves in the past then I challenge you and our fellow professional to throw off these self limiting beliefs and see ourselves for what we truly should be and that is highly skilled professionals who are called upon by our society to take up a multitude of leadership roles that cry for the skills and abilities that we have to offer.

The opportunities are there for all of us and we are called upon to find where we can best contribute. It will be different for each of us. Perhaps it will be on the local parish council assisting with planning and finance management. Perhaps it will be in the front trenches amongst the blood and bandages of one of the many valuable welfare organisations, perhaps it will be on the board of an NGO or other enterprise or perhaps it will be assisting your own profession as part of a team leading your peers through any one of a number of valuable committees, but I will come back to that theme in a moment. Don't underestimate what you can do or how highly your contribution will be valued. Each one of us has a lot to offer and arguably, a moral obligation at least, to offer it. Our profession is after all about serving the public good.

Another perception that I would like to challenge this morning, because it so often limits some of our best and brightest from making a contribution that they are eminently qualified to make, is age.

It is the mistaken belief that as a member of the engineering team we, for some reason, have to have a grey beard and a receding hairline before we are credible, or even worse, should be offered an opportunity to lead.

This brings me to Young Engineers our co-hosts for this morning. I would have to say that if I had to use one tag line to describe Young Engineers it would be "bright young things" and this is certainly true of just about every Young Engineer that I have met who have been involved in Engineers Australia and I have met quite a few. I think that this is partly because they self select and what I mean is that it is generally those young engineers that have drive and ability, who seek to differentiate

themselves from their peers and want to make a contribution that get involved. So if you are a young engineer I could give you no better career advice than to get involved. Be associated with the best and brightest of your professional peers and make a difference. To those of us a little older, the managers and mentors of this rising talent I would say encourage the young engineers in your organisation to get involved and support them as they lead the way. There are plenty of opportunities including the Young Engineers group that Sandra leads. So if you are under 35 and haven't introduced yourself to her yet I would encourage you to do so as I am sure that she will be more than happy to meet you.

I was very fortunate when I was a much younger engineer that I took the opportunity to get involved in the South Australian Division of the Institution of Engineers and helped set up their Young Engineers group. Through that I was exposed to a range of issues that I would not normally have had a chance to be exposed to had I just stayed within the confines of my day to day employment. I found that I was welcomed and encouraged and got to rub shoulders with much more senior engineers who passed on their pearls of wisdoms to this young new comer for which I was very grateful. So Young Engineers was my introduction to Engineers Australia and though I moved around Australia, I continued to take the amazing opportunities on offer from the local chapters to get engaged with their groups and committees. Within our local chapter we have Young Engineers group, Civil/Structural group, Electrical, Heritage, Geomechanics, Mechanical, Women in Engineering, Maintenance, and of course our co-hosts this morning the Centre for Engineering Leadership and Management very ably lead by Prof Chris Letchford. There are of course many ways to get engaged in addition to these groups.

I'll give some examples from my experience. Whilst in the ACT a number of years ago, I was lucky enough to be a judge in the Engineering Excellence Awards one year and to run it another. Through this process I got first hand exposure to some of the most amazing engineering projects in the region which I would otherwise never had had a chance to see. It was exciting, enjoyable and broadened my understanding of engineering. Through involvement in various committees I learnt how to run meetings, learnt about effective governance and develop a broad network of professional peers. I had the opportunity to sit on business councils, to meet with Premiers, and politicians to discuss engineering issues, appear on radio and television and throughout the whole process meet some of the most amazing and interesting people that you could ever hope to meet, have them expand my mind and my horizons and count them as my friends.

This was just a small part of my story. What will yours be?

One last memory, many years ago when I was a young Chairman of Canberra Division I met a charming old chap who at the time was setting up Registered Engineers for Disaster Relief. We used to catch up for a cup of tea occasionally and he would tell me engineering war stories from the time that he had a small consulting engineering practice and give me his views on the ways of the world. I valued that time. I was still in the Army then. I left Canberra to do further studies and a number of years later I returned. I had been back only a few months when I got a call from this gentleman asking me to come and join his old company, which I had hardly ever heard of, to establish their Defence business. The company of course was Sinclair Knight Merz and the gentleman was Bruce

Sinclair. I can therefore say with absolute honesty that if it wasn't for my involvement in Engineers Australia I wouldn't be where I am today.

The opportunities are there for the taking.

Get involved with your community.

Get involved with your profession.

Support your young engineers as they lead the way, and take up the challenge to be the change you want to see around you and in this way you will be truly celebrating the year of Engineering Leadership.

Thankyou.

Greg Walters
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