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AEI  
(281) 350.7027  
nblackwell@aeiengr.com

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hjreddish@sbinfra.com

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### Engineering Leadership Forum ASCE, ASME, HESS, SAME, SWE and TSPE

*present the*

#### 2004-2005 LEADERSHIP SERIES - SESSION III

#### The Professional Liability for Architects and Engineers

Date:: Wednesday, October 27, 2004

Time: 5:30 p.m. Social  
6:00 – 7:00 p.m., Program

Place: HESS Club Building, 5430 Westheimer  
(see [www.hessclub.com](http://www.hessclub.com) for a map)

Cost: \$20.00/person (includes light snacks & desserts)

## Featured Speaker

**Debra B. Norris, P.C.**, attorney at law, combines her engineering and legal backgrounds in a technically oriented law practice. As an electrical engineer, Debra spent ten years building plants for the oil, gas, and chemical industries. Debra earned a B.S. in Electrical Engineering, magna cum laude, from Louisiana Tech University and a B.A. in physics, cum laude, from Centenary College in 1984. Graduating from the University of Texas School of Law in 1998, she now represents individuals and corporations in a variety of legal matters, with special focus on construction litigation. This evening, you will hear case studies of construction industry disputes involving design professionals and review recent legislative changes in the law of professional liability for architects and engineers.

Please RSVP by October 25th

with your name and company name

to Linda Benson at

(713) 627-2283 or [lindab@hessclub.com](mailto:lindab@hessclub.com)

# From the President's Desk

Fall is upon us. School is back in session. Most of us have taken our vacations and now we're back to work, focusing on the issues that are important to our companies and our careers. The Greater Houston Chapter of TSPE is back to work, too. After a few months off to regroup and gear up for a new society year, we're back to work; and we're also focusing on issues important to the engineering community.

Continuing education is on every licensed engineer's mind right now. What exactly do I have to do? When do I have to get it done? Where can I get some help with this issue? "What" and "when" are easy questions that can be answered by visiting the Continuing Education Program link on the Texas Board of Professional Engineers website [www.tbpe.state.tx.us](http://www.tbpe.state.tx.us).

But what about the question, "Where can I get some help with this issue?" The answer is TSPE. The Greater Houston Chapter is your link with the world of regulations and legislation affecting the engineering profession. We are always glad to hear from you with questions and/or suggestions and we are working hard to provide valuable and economical continuing education services to our membership. {For more information about the events discussed in this article, please visit our website at [www.tspehouston.org](http://www.tspehouston.org).}

Your local Greater Houston Chapter has been hard at work this past year helping organize and administer the popular Leadership Forum seminar series. Leadership Forum is going strong, with new seminars in the field of professional development offered each month. In addition to the Leadership Forum series, TSPE will be offering a half-day Presentation Skills seminar on October 14, 2004, conducted by Dr. Tracy Volz of Rice University. Dr. Volz's last presentation for TSPE was completely sold out and space is limited for this event. The time to sign up is now!

But wait....that's not all, folks! TSPE is the only organization in Houston offering in-person, low-cost ethics seminars to meet the Continuing Education Program requirement for a minimum of one hour of ethics training each

least one or two more before the end of the year.

If you haven't had the opportunity to attend one of these seminars, please stay tuned to our website for information on upcoming ethics events.

Continuing education is looming large in the engineering community right now, but the Greater Houston Chapter has a lot of other things going on as well. The first MATHCOUNTS mini-competition is scheduled for October 2, 2004, 8:00 a.m. at Doerre Intermediate School in north Houston. We need volunteers! If you haven't had an opportunity to participate in this amazing program for middle school students, now's the time to get involved. These kids are the future of our profession and we need you to help support and encourage them.

Each year, the Greater Houston Chapter gives thousands of dollars in scholarships to young engineering students. We will soon be sending notices out to area high schools for applications. If you know a young person interested in pursuing an engineering degree, encourage them to apply for the TSPE scholarship.

Additionally, we are working to schedule some really great speakers and presenters for the monthly Chapter membership meetings. You will be seeing a survey in the near future asking for your input on meeting topics and I hope that you will send in a response. Your input is very important to the success of the Greater Houston Chapter.

I'd like to leave each of you with a challenge for this year. I'm asking each member of TSPE to set a goal to attend at least one Chapter meeting this year and participate in at least one Chapter event. That's just a few hours out of the 8,760 hours you have available for the year. I know that everyone can fit that into a schedule. TSPE is all about the members. Without your participation, we're nowhere. So get involved, even if only in a small way. You

Nancy C. Blackwell, P.E.  
President

# **Greater Houston Chapter of TSPE**

## **Scholarship**

On Monday, September 20 the Scholarship Task Force Committee met to brainstorm ideas of improving the scholarship program. Attending this meeting were: Liza Howard, Franco Puentes, Howard Wellspring, Joel Colwell, Richard Davis, Will Wilkinson, and our host, Tom Posey. The purpose of this Task Force is to improve the distribution of the Chapter's scholarship dollars and to ensure our investment is spent on future Texas engineers, who will become active members of TSPE and/or NSPE. Discussion ranged from offering a combination of scholarships to both graduating high school seniors and current college students to providing 4 year renewable scholarships and adding financial need as a selection criteria. The next step will be to develop eligibility criteria for renewable scholarships and to prepare a formal proposal to the Board of Directors.

The Texas Education Foundation's scholarship application has been posted on TSPE's website. Applications are due to the local scholarship coordinator postmarked no later than January 15, 2005. Letters will be sent to local high schools notifying their scholarship counselor of our chapter scholarship after the Board of Directors considers the Task Force's recommendation.

## **Top Ten Mistakes of Strategic Planning**

By Herbert M. Cannon

**10. Not Having a Strategic Plan:** Sadly, most A/E firms do not have the discipline to take several days every year to develop or update their strategic plan. If you have never participated in an effective strategic planning retreat, you might be tempted to dismiss the process as a waste of time. Or think it is something only of value to the "big boys".

If you think this way - you are wrong. An effective strategic planning retreat can be a transformational event. Strategic planning is important for every firm.

**9. Using an In-House Facilitator:** Many firms first try to use an in-house facilitator to lead the strategic planning process. This person they choose is usually the CEO. Using your CEO as the facilitator will lead to disappointing results at best. Most likely the CEO has no experience in being a facilitator and doesn't really understand the strategic planning process. Strategic planning participants will be reluctant to openly share their true feelings and ideas when the CEO takes on the facilitator role.

**8. Having Too Many Attendees:** As with most meetings the results you produce are inversely proportional to the number of attendees. Do your best to limit the participants to around 10 or so. You might hurt some feelings, but you will accomplish a lot more.

**7. Holding the Session In House:** Do your best to hold the session away from the office. The temptations of taking that important phone call, interruptions by your staff and checking your e-mail are too much for most firms to overcome. You don't need to travel to a distant location, but try to do it away from the office. It will set the tone as something special and not business as usual.

**6. Setting Your Goals Too Low Lousy Goals = Lousy Results:**

Let me repeat that. Lousy Goals = Lousy Results

Your goals need to be difficult but achievable. You will not inspire anyone with goals like increasing sales by 4% or increasing profits by 5%. Raise the bar of expectations and you have a much better chance of inspiring your staff – and producing better results.

**5. Believing that Tactics are Secondary to Strategy:** Tactics are the actions and processes that you implement every day in order to achieve the goals laid out in your strategic plan. They are the basic things we do every day (or should do every day) that over the long run will help us achieve our goals.

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## **Top Ten Mistakes of Strategic Planning (continued from page 3)**

Strategy is the Vision. Tactics are the Action

**4. Too Much Documentation of the Plan:** The quality of a strategic plan should not be judged on how much it weighs. There are certain consultants in this industry that produce 100 page strategic plans that are 90% boilerplate. I can only assume they charge by the pound. The best strategic plans are short 15 to 20 page action oriented plans. The strategic plan is really a plan for action with deadlines and a plan follow-up.

**3. Mistaking the Strategic Plan for a Marketing Plan:** Marketing is only one component of a strategic plan – and in many cases it is the most important part of your plan. Other components include, project delivery, organizational structure, human resources, ownership transition and financial. Be sure to include these components when producing your p l a n .

**2. Using the Wrong Outside Facilitator:** If you have wisely decided to use an outside facilitator, please be sure to use someone who has an extensive background in the A/E Industry. Choose a facilitator that has run an A/E firm or has held a senior position at a larger firm. A person with this background has real hands on experience to draw upon. Don't settle for someone with an MBA that has never even worked in an A/E firm.

**1. Not Following Through:** A strategic plan that sits on the shelf gathering dust is of little value. You took the time to develop a plan, set goals, assigned responsibility for action now you must hold each other accountable for following through. Don't make it a stealth plan - share the non-confidential decisions with your employees. In order to maintain your focus, commit to reviewing the progress on a monthly b a s i s .

Herbert M. Cannon, President of AEC Management Solutions, Inc. and Publisher of AEC Managing Partner Newsletter, is a management consultant, seminar provider and speaker exclusive to the A/E Industry. He is available to speak at company meetings and conferences. For more information contact Herb via e-mail [hcannon@aecmanagementsolutions.com](mailto:hcannon@aecmanagementsolutions.com). Or visit his website at [www.aecmanagementsolutions.com](http://www.aecmanagementsolutions.com)

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## **TSPE Scholarship Fund Raiser**

Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves at this year's golf tournament, so much that some people decided to stay for another round. As you know the money raised at this tournament goes to help future engineer's college education.

This years participants and/or companies included; AEI Engineering; Cobb, Fendley & Assoc.; Fugro South; HBC/Terracon; Midway Residential; Othon; Pegasus; RG Miller; (individuals) Jim Cartwright, Bonnie Moss, Michael McMicken, Vensus Nahid, Adam Earle and Brian Jones.

We would also like to thank Academy Sports and Outdoors for donating gift certificates, Longwood Golf Course for donating rounds of golf, Rinker Materials for donating a golf bag for a door prize and Vanco for donating the signs for sponsors.

Thanks to all of you for your continued participation and for making this event and previous events successful year after year.

## P-R-O-F-E-S-S-I-O-N-A-L

I decided to look up the word “professional” the other day. I was determined to seek a method to transfer its meaning to a given organization, such as ours. Along the way I learned something about people.

Webster's Dictionary defines it several ways:

- *Of, or relating to, or characteristic of a profession.* Okay. That makes sense, since a profession is characterized by a principal calling, vocation, or employment. I guess I fit into that category.
- *Engaged in one of the learned professions.* I'll agree with that one, too. Just as I am engaged in the engineering profession, doctors, lawyers, scientists, and others can also be said to be professionals in their respective fields.
- *Characterized by or conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession.* Now they're digging a little deeper into the meaning of the word. No longer is it solely related to employment or obtaining a degree. This meaning is concerned with a behavior, and is derived from a value system that no doubt stems from societal ethics and morals.
- *Exhibiting a courteous, conscious, and generally businesslike manner in the workplace.* Again, this definition is related to behavior towards others. Not only is this meaning required for professionals, but it extends towards all employees. Based on this definition, secretaries, clerks, and the like should also be considered professionals. In order to succeed as a business venture, virtually all employees need to treat each other with the same respect that they expect to receive.

Let's move on ...

*Participating for gain or livelihood in an activity or field of endeavor often engaged in by amateurs.* What in

- *tarnation does that mean?* The dictionary provides the example of a professional golfer. Perhaps, upon reflection, I might consider some of our engineering work as something amateurs might do in some instances. For example, some engineering design work is undoubtedly performed by electricians, building designers and architects, especially in locales which have little or no governing regulations and standards or permits.
- *Having a particular profession as a permanent career.* Since I'm in my late 40's, I'm well on my way to achieving that, barring some unforeseen catastrophe.
- *Engaged in by persons receiving financial return.* I'm not working for peanuts.
- *Following a line of conduct as though it were a profession.* Though I've earned my Professional Engineer's license, many of my colleagues are experts in their engineering fields, yet they have not pursued a P.E. Many more are solid performers who contribute much to their companies' bottom lines. Clearly, to me they are all professionals.

Then there is another definition of professional, located all by itself, just below the previous ones:

- *One that is professional; esp.: one that engages in a pursuit of activity professionally.*

Allow me to elaborate on this one.

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*continued from page 5*

This definition states that a professional should meet one or more of the previous definitions of a professional. Virtually everyone that I associate with in business matches one of those descriptions.

*Engages in a pursuit* – There's an interesting sideline. How does one engage in the pursuit? The act of pursuing can be chasing, attempting to keep up, or just plain waiting for something to catch up to you. To me *pursuing* is synonymous with understanding my business, from continuing education to technical advancements. In other words, being professional means not sitting on one's laurels, rather bettering oneself throughout his/her career. *Engagement* means meeting or coming to terms with something. From my perspective there are three types of "engagees":

**1. The non-participant**

The non-participant doesn't actively look for additional knowledge. He waits for it to find him. He performs his work dutifully, but does not actively seek to learn more about his profession. He probably does not belong to a professional or technical society, or, if he does belong, he pays his dues but doesn't take advantage of the many benefits that they offer. The vast majority of engineers fall into this first category.

**2. The participant follower**

The follower might be the sort of person that scans articles in technical journals and has some acquired knowledge based on limited contact. He is likely a dues paying member of a technical and/or professional group. He attends some meetings and participates fully when he has the time. I run across many participants in my line of work. Many would like to be more involved, but their priorities are placed elsewhere – their company, their family, their hobby, their own discretionary time. There are others in this group who are waiting to be asked to do more – I call them wallflowers. These people are the most difficult to find because they often don't just volunteer to do more;

they have to be found and matched to activities that they might truly enjoy.

**3. The participant leader**

The leaders are best described as those participants that not only engage, but who embrace their professions. They can be seen digging into technical articles, seeking to further their knowledge. Many of them author articles on technical advancements; many more use their knowledge to improve their companies' performance. Some of them do it for personal gain and some do it because they believe that it is part of the job requirement ... a commonality is that they all enjoy this pursuit. Other leaders are best described as folks that volunteer to be on committees, take leadership roles in their societies, and many times can be found volunteering for worthy charitable causes or at religious events. Some of them get involved in politics.

One that engages in the pursuit of activity professionally – is that you? Is that what you'd like to do? Remember those classmates in school and college that led all those clubs and organizations? I'll bet you were among them. You've still got it in you. I urge you to take a hard look at yourself and ask yourself how you can become a better professional. You'll learn quite a bit about yourself if you take that step. More importantly, perhaps, you'll teach others through your involvement because you can give what no one else can – your commitment and your experiences.

I'm sure you'll agree with me that this world needs more leaders, people that others can look up to and emulate. Leaders don't just happen; they have to step forward.

*"I am not concerned that you have fallen; I am concerned that you arise."* – Abraham Lincoln

Till next time ...  
James Pappas

## *From The Auxillary*

The Auxiliary to the Greater Houston Chapter will meet on Thursday, October 21, 11:00 AM, in the home of Ms. Sudha Vijayvergiya. The program is "Body and Mind Wellness" presented by Mary Accinelli.

The next Auxiliary meeting will be held on November 18, 2004, 11:00 AM meeting will be held at the Mason Jar restaurant. Bert Link will be speaking on the topic of South American Travels.

For reservations please contact Chairmen Barbara Clinton, 713/464-3244 or Ms. Ann Bickham, 713/ 856-7216.

## *Upcoming Events:*

October 12th – 11:30 AM;  
Monthly Meeting

October 14th - TSPE  
Continuing Education - Half Day Seminar "Presentation Skills Workshop"



October 27th – 5:30 PM  
Leadership Series Session III

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