MEET ALUMNI

Build Your Leadership —Insights from an Engineer’s Career

EDWARD S. PLOTKIN, PE, F. ASCE, BCE, MCE, MBA, Class of 1953

EDWARD PLOTKIN
received his B.E. (Civil) degree from CCNY in 1953 and MCE in 1958. He has held various positions such as Vice President of Maclean Grove (tunnel constructor), Assistant Director with Deleuw Cather, a consulting engineering firm, for the 1970’s plans for the 2nd Avenue Subway. He was a Consultant with the DMJM+Harris / Arup design team for the present 2nd Avenue Subway and served as Westchester County’s Commissioner of public works. In addition to his work experience he has served in many professional engineering organizations such as Director of the American Society of Civil Engineers Metropolitan Section, President of the Westchester County chapter of the New York State Society of Professional Engineers, President of the Municipal Engineers of NYC, and committee member of the Society of Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration’s Underground Construction Association. Additionally, he has been a speaker at many annual events of the North American Tunneling Conference, the Rapid Tunneling and Excavation Conference, and the Moles Education Committee. Recently Mr. Plotkin received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2010 North American Tunneling Conference in Portland from the SME (Society of Mining, Metallurgy and Exploration).

Currently he is an adjunct professor at Manhattan College and Mercy College. He is very active in the CCNY community and he is current president of the CCNY Engineering School Alumni (ESA). In this article Mr. Plotkin emphasizes the importance of getting involved in your community and organizations. “My teachers at Brooklyn Tech and professors at CCNY often explained that growth in an engineering career is usually enhanced by participation in non-business related organizations. You can never anticipate where or when someone you meet can be instrumental in your future endeavors.”

As an undergraduate civil engineering student at CCNY in the early 50’s, my objective was to get “that degree” and then get the Professional Engineer license needed to open the doors to a lifetime career. To achieve a leadership status, I had to consider what should be my career objectives allowing me to advance during my engineering employment. At the time, I could not appreciate the importance of additional education and the critical impact of public interface.

My teachers at Brooklyn Tech and professors at CCNY often explained that growth in an engineering career is usually enhanced by participation in non-business related organizations. You can never anticipate where or when someone you meet can be instrumental in your future endeavors. I discovered that the over-used term “networking” for meeting active leaders in the industry does provide unanticipated opportunities. The concept of “being in the right place at the right time” works better when you are in many places, at many times.

I could not have appreciated the responsibilities associated with my future positions in the discipline of civil engineering. Nor did I understand my future personal responsibility to “give back” to the College the lessons I learned after graduation and what was achieved because of the CCNY experience. One position that I now enjoy is my present term as President of the Engineering School Alumni (ESA), an affiliate of the Alumni Association of CCNY. I have the opportunity to give back by continuous contact with the students and faculty for many possible career enhancing purposes such as:

• The establishment of relationships with industry, and the dissemination of knowledge of the Grove School of Engineering of the City College
• The opportunity for engineering students to “network” with Alumni in their chosen facet of the engineering profession;
• The recognition of achievements by the presentation of medals or other awards to graduates and students of the College, who have distinguished themselves in any of the branches of engineering or their allied sciences;
• The presentation and discussion of technical papers by members and by guests to faculty and students.

All CCNY graduates can, and should be members of the CCNY Alumni Association (AA). Engineering graduates should become active members of the ESA. All new graduates are entitled to one year free membership in the CCNY AA. You should consider continuing your membership and affiliation.
with the college. The personal and charitable benefits far exceed the time and effort of your participation.

One way the ESA enhanced the graduates engineering careers was by the introduction of the “Order of the Engineer” ceremony at the May 2010 college graduation at which event all engineering graduates take the Engineer’s oath and accept the ring as a symbol of the profession; a tradition long performed at many North American engineering colleges. Engineers in all of the engineering discipline acknowledge their responsibility to society. Some will perform directly as government or agency employees, others via private corporations, others as individuals acting as advisors or consultants to their industry and of course, some in academia to continue the development and education of future generations. In all situations, it is advisable for all to attain the status of Professional Engineer in their venue of employment thereby formally, and legally permitting their title of “Engineer”.

My personal Civil Engineering experiences have extended across multiple facets in the industry. I have been fortunate to have been employed in many positions after my military service that occurred soon after graduation. Synopses of the jobs I have had include:

- As a Contractor, I was Vice President of MacLean Grove, a tunnel constructor. I was Site Project Manager for a 63rd Street Cross-town Subway section, two stations on the Washington subway, a station cavern on the Boston subway, and a section of the NYC DEP Water Tunnel in Manhattan. The Water Tunnel project included a deep rock tunnel beneath Amsterdam Avenue with a 600+ feet deep shaft at CCNY at W. 135th Street.
- As a Designer, I was Assistant Director with Delew Cather, a consulting engineering firm, for the 1970’s plans for the 2nd Avenue Subway, and was a Consultant with the DMJM+Harris / Arup design team for the present for the 2nd Avenue Subway.
- In Government, I was Westchester County’s Commissioner of Public Works. My responsibility included all county roads and highways and the County’s facilities’ planning, design, construction, operations and maintenance, in addition to a $200M annual budget for new and on-going capital programs.
- As an independent Consultant, I am involved nationally with constructability issues, Value Engineering, Project Peer Review, Mediation, and Dispute Review Boards.
- As an Adjunct Professor, I taught Physics at Manhattan College and now teach Environmental Science at the Mercy College program at the Sing Sing Correctional Facility.

Pro bono activities provided me an environment for meeting fellow Engineers and agency executives, and a venue to enhance public speaking and presentation skills. I did join many organizations and have developed close relationships with fellow engineers across the nation. The engineering industry includes professionals from all facets and in many firms and agencies. The various personal contacts I made through engineering organizations often resulted in meeting friends and associates on many projects during business-related conferences. Each of the engineering disciplines have organizations related to their field.

Some examples of my memberships include: Director in the American Society of Civil Engineers Metropolitan Section; President of the Westchester County chapter of the New York State Society of Professional Engineers; President of the Municipal Engineers of NYC, Committee Member of the Society of Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration's Underground Construction Association; speaker at many annual events of the North American Tunneling Conference and the Rapid Tunneling and Excavation Conference; and The Moles, Education Committee, an organization composed of individuals now or formally engaged in the construction of tunnel, subway, sewer, foundation, marine, sub-aqueous or other heavy construction projects. I believe it is apropos to mention that most of the described organizations have awarded annual scholarships to CCNY engineering students.

Since I also believe that Engineers should be important contributors to their community, I volunteered and have been Chair of the Village of Dobbs Ferry Planning Board for over 45 years. The Board responsibilities include reviewing, planning and processing the approval of land development and environmental conservation.

Teaching an Environmental Science course as an Adjunct Professor at the Sing Sing Correctional Facility is a particularly interesting assignment that has been a totally unanticipated positive, enjoyable and educational experience. The inmates admit finding Environmental Science as one of their required elective courses quite difficult. Most inmates have very little background in the study of sciences therefore requiring me more class preparation than that typical for usual courses. My class format follows a college format; detailed report assignments, multiple quiz and test exams, stringent quality standards for submissions, and required classroom participation. The results repeatedly have been that the students developed strong opinions on environmental issues and have produced well written essays on pertinent problems in the field. More importantly, the mature members of the students are active, excited and have responded with an intense interest and with a logical, intelligent attitude.

The comparisons of my academic associations are slightly similar. I know the elective course I teach at Sing Sing is required for a BA degree in Behavioral Science that will allow the student to work in the social services field when released. My reward at Sing Sing is my students will be productive citizens upon reentering society. My association with the CCNY Alumni Association gives me an opportunity to assist students to greater opportunities in engineering. Both associations satisfy my “give back” philosophy. ∞