

Chuck Salmon



Staying Relevant in a Changing World

The changing world we live in demands that all professionals must continue to educate themselves to keep abreast of both social and technological change. The same demands are cast upon the professional organizations legislated to protect the public by being responsible for the professional ethics and standards of their members.

The Corporation of Land Surveyors of the Province of British Columbia recognizes these demands; it is actively reviewing the entry standards, quality assurance of the members, and ongoing continuing professional development.

As is the case with most professions, there is an educational component for entry into the profession. In land surveying, this can be achieved either through survey engineering/cadastral studies courses at the University of Calgary, or through a combination of courses at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), then passing a series of entry examinations with the Western Canadian Board of Examiners (WCBE). Following entry as a student or Land Surveyor in Training, a period of articles is entered into. At the completion of this article period, the student's qualifications are assessed and, if satisfactory, the student may then write the professional examinations.

With the development of a degree in technology program at BCIT and the signing this year of an agreement on

internal trade with all the provincial land surveying professions, it is important to determine whether our educational requirements, including the process for articles, meet the demands of the changing society. Once a person completes this complex process and becomes a British Columbia land surveyor, he or she wants a break from studying and writing exams. Some may sit back and relax, thinking their education is complete, and that they can get on with doing business.

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This couldn't be farther from truth; they soon learn there is no end to the educational process because continuing professional development becomes a significant factor in their life. How does a profession continue to ensure that the public is protected, with all of the changes that challenge a profession to stay current? I am sure most professional organizations have wrestled with the concept of continuing professional development from both the mandatory and volunteer stance; I am going to stay away from that debate in this article. What I do want to explore is the makeup of continuing professional development.

There are at least two sides to continuing professional development: the

legal/ethical side and the practical/business side. I would like to think all professionals are keeping up with statute, regulation, and bylaw changes, along with any recent legal precedents that may very well alter how we perform our professional duties, for example, the way a land surveyor re-establishes a property boundary. The legal/ethical side is the crux of what constitutes a professional, and professionals should be modern in their approach to resolving issues. Regular courses provided by the academia are available and readily tracked, if a profession chose to go the mandatory route. But what constitutes a course in the practical/business side?

Technological change is rapidly altering how we do our business today. The obvious changes are the field surveys, where a land surveyor would not be very competitive doing his surveys with a transit and chain, when his competitor is using a total station and real-time geographic positioning. The migration from the older technology to the newer technology requires significant training, a very important part of continuing professional development. The same goes for the office portion of land surveying. The migration from manual calculators using log books and trigonometric tables and manual drafting techniques, to the modern-day computer technology with electronic plotters, has required the land surveyor to acquire a significant amount of training or continuing professional development.

Those are the obvious changes, but what about the less obvious courses?

In my career I have had to learn how to use electronic mail and delivery of products and services over the Internet, standard office tools that make our daily work ethics much more productive, and the whole suite of management of large computer systems where I learned about servers, shared network services, mass storage techniques, and shared data delivered over the Internet through large system databases.

Has any of this made me a better land surveyor? Probably not, but in my opinion, it has made me a better professional; I believe it has helped to meet the requirement to protect the public. Whether a land surveyor is in public office or a private practitioner, all of these modern techniques help provide better service and better communication to clients. Does this education serve to fulfill obligations in a mandatory continuing professional development

program? I believe it does, but I also recognize that proof of this type of education will be very difficult to record on a checklist and convince peers that obligations have been met.

Another aspect of the practical/business side of continuing professional development is the operation of a business. It is important for all practitioners to operate their business in a professional manner, ensuring that they are charging enough to keep their business viable and providing a safe working environment for their employees.

Too often we concentrate on the legal/ethical education side and the technological change, but don't spend enough time learning how to run our business properly. Our profession has developed a Business Practices committee that is ensuring that land surveyors have all of the necessary information and education available to operate a healthy business. It is important over the next few years, as the land surveying

profession explores the mechanisms to ensure quality assurance and provide continuing professional development, that all land surveyors become very familiar with the work of this committee.

Running a business in the 21st century is significantly more complex than 50 or even 25 years ago. It is far more important to stay modern now than it was then. How does someone who has been practising for 25 or 30 years keep up with these changes? How do professionals stay relevant in this changing world? Continuing professional development is one of the most critical directions a professional must explore today. ▲

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