



Photo: PCI

You better have teamwork, or you better be perfect

William Nickas, *Editor-in-Chief*

Recently, I was approached by some concerned concrete design engineers because they were not getting all the data needed to decide on a system being considered for a new expressway. When policymakers lack data, they can be skewed into an action that is unwarranted. This type of feedback caused me to reflect on how my career has left me with certain entrenched principles... You better have teamwork, or you better be perfect.

As I have editorialized before, my principles have come from many places. When I reported to my first job right out of college, I was ready to roll. Like most of us, it did not take long to identify how much on-the-job training (OJT) was still going to be required. Soon enough, I settled into the bridge design office where it did not take long to recognize why the squad leaders sitting closest to the doors were in-charge. Going to coffee breaks and eating lunch together proved to expand my OJT experience. Listening to these veterans of more than 25 years, each discussing recent and past bridge challenges, certainly shaped my future. Very often, they had developed an instinct on where to look or whom to ask for potential solutions.

Today, with the available internet search tools, engineers have volumes of data at their fingers. Our training has taught us to ask diligent questions like:

- is this creditable?
- is this relative to my concern?
- is this objective?
- is there a bias here?
- are the data current and complete? and
- are the conclusions supported with the presented data?

Engineers often believe that the natural process of creating and submitting an evolving project (30, 60, 90, and 100% plan reviews) will expose any concerns. This is not always the case when you are trying something new.

Innovation really means using our best engineering solutions (standards of practice and codified tools) in a creative unbridled manner that best meets the project needs. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and the Transportation Research Board committees are formally commissioned and routinely come together as teams in a large league to advance technologies, find solutions, and exchange knowledge. Over the last year, the FHWA hosted a series of regional meetings (known as Peer2Peer exchanges) where neighboring states gathered and hosted diversified bridge engineers from other corners of the nation.

These exchanges facilitated discussions between state agency engineers and representatives of the steel, composite, and concrete industries. These exchanges also molded new relationships. One visiting engineer said, "I came all this way not to tell you what to do but I am here to show you what can be done" and those seeds are now bearing fruit. In small breakout meetings, the visiting bridge engineers could share details of lessons learned in a round table fashion, forging new long-lasting exchanges. These informal groups are still working to maximize positive energy through effective resource utilization with continuity and flexibility. With each department of transportation comes certain time tested practices. Many of the concepts and details shared in these FHWA-hosted meetings are now being adapted to meet the needs of the local jurisdiction. Having these new contacts to gather feedback, however, allows the change agent within his or her bridge department to not worry about having to be perfect because he or she is part of a new team.

As you see state highway bridge departments change and adapt new concrete technologies please let the *ASPIRE*TM team know. Please continue to send in your great concrete projects so that you too can expand your realm of exposure and become part of a growing team and always remember: you better have teamwork or you better be perfect. 



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Editor-in-Chief

William Nickas • wnickas@pci.org

Managing Technical Editor

Dr. Henry G. Russell

Program Manager

Nancy Turner • nturner@pci.org

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Cover

Arch setting at night of the West 7th Street Bridge in Fort Worth, Tex.

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Ad Sales

Jim Oestmann

Phone: (847) 838-0500 • Cell: (847) 924-5497

Fax: (847) 838-0555 • joestmann@arlpub.com

Reprints

Paul Grigonis • pgrigonis@pci.org

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James G. Toscas, President

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