

Your Professional Geoscientist Designation: A Job or a Lifestyle?

ABSTRACT

“P.Geo.” after your name announces to the world that you have at least the minimum competence to practice geoscience without supervision. It also means that a panel of your peers recognizes your degree and work experience as necessary and sufficient to allow you to safely apply the principles of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and probably biology to practical problems involving geology and earth processes. It also means belonging to a self-governing Association entrusted by the Alberta Legislature for maintaining and enforcing the Engineering and Geosciences Professions Act.

At least, that is the narrow interpretation. In a broader sense, “P.Geo.” on a business card identifies you as a fellow practitioner by others in the professions. It means a common bond of shared interests and a set of expectations in terms of honesty, integrity and a desire to learn more about the earth and related planets. It also allows instant communication founded in a common education and experience that transcends age, gender and ethnic origin. The bearer of the card can be trusted and the trust can be verified through the public record.

A Professional Geoscientist is automatically identified as a team player who is prepared to lead when called upon; to follow when specialized technical knowledge is required; and to be forthright in all matters related to the Code of Ethics, particularly where the public interest and safety is involved.

At the interpersonal level, leadership by a younger person in a work team with older professionals can be challenging – the “Generation Gap” can appear when issues like work/life balance; child care and job priority arise. The soft skills required to successfully stickhandle through non-technical, workplace relationship problems must be addressed during the Geoscientist in Training period through coaching, course work, mentoring and firsthand experience.

Geoscience work is generally project-oriented. To be successful means understanding and practicing sound project management skills that are not usually taught in university as a regular part of the undergraduate curriculum. Business skills are closely related to project management and not taught at all in the contemporary university program. Early in the Professional Geoscientists’ career it becomes necessary to communicate with related professionals in engineering; business (finance, accounting, capital budgeting and so forth); law and land administration. Developing and implementing a business plan rooted in those relationships is a precondition to exploring, conducting technical surveys, consulting and all the other functions of a practicing professional.

Modern geoscience includes consulting with communities and land holders whose lives may be touched by proposed projects in order to obtain a Social License to Operate in any given territory. Understanding the implications of social impacts to others will be crucial to the success of a project. Part of this process involves discovering the Law of Unintended Consequences and mitigating those consequences so that no one gets hurt. A related set of issues involves the health and safety of those workers who will earn their living from the P.Geo.’s project.

Practicing geoscience in the 21st century is far more complicated than it was in all of history up to the year 2000, which is not to say that it has ever been easy. Today's P.Geo. must be expert at all of the work done by our intellectual forbears, as well as living up to society's expectations in 2015.