

# President's Report

By Rick Brouwer, RPF



## The Nature of Professionalism

The theme of this issue—consultants—got me thinking... how do I define myself? How do others see me? Do they think of me as a consultant, or as a professional who can provide specific services? Or, because I am a consultant, do people automatically think I might be a “hired gun” or a “mercenary?”

This then led me to consider how I think of forest professionals that are in different employment groups. Over the years I have often witnessed the polarization of our members by employer group, and the associated assumptions regarding how that reflects in our expectations of professional conduct. Those assumptions then can lead to varying perceptions of how ‘professional’ the forest professionals truly are. The following are some of the perceptions that I have heard:

- There are forest professionals who “Just got this stupid designation so I could get (or keep) my job.”
- There are forest professionals who will do whatever their bosses tell them to do. Variations include professionals that are:
  - in the employ of industry – they couldn’t care less about the forest – it’s just “do whatever is necessary to allow us to log.”
  - employed by government – who blindly “follow the book” regardless of whether it makes sense or is in the best interest of the public or the forest.
  - consultant forest professionals who will promise the moon regardless of their competency or ability to perform the task at hand.
- That there are forest professionals who will sign off on anything that is put in front of them.

If these descriptions make you bristle or get your hackles up, then good! That probably means you do not want people to think of forest professionals in that way.

Most certainly, these are stereotypes; but often, stereotypes have some basis in fact. I think that we all have heard, and possibly experienced, some variations on the stereotypes above. But, are these the stereotypes that we want people to think of when we ask them to support us in our mandate to protect the public’s interest? I think not. But what will you do about it? What can you do about it?

Who you work for does not make you into different types of professionals. Your professionalism stands outside your circumstance of employment. In order to break the stereotypes, we have to look in the mirror. Do you talk about those “industry foresters” or those “ministry foresters,” or those “guns for hire?” If so, you are not only buying into, but also promoting, the stereotypes. We’re all forest professionals, and if we remember this, and work to think of ourselves as such, then we have taken an important step towards changing the stereotype.

Look in the mirror. Feel comfortable with yourself as a professional first and as an employee second. Let that feeling expand beyond yourself, and allow yourself to think of and approach others as professionals.

It’s not easy, but true change comes from within ... and leadership starts with one person.

Go ahead. Lead. Be a professional. 🌱



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