



The Race to the Bottom: It's a Long and Painful Chase

IT IS TIME TO EXPLORE THE CONSEQUENCES OF the race-to-the-bottom behaviour that we are experiencing within forestry. When compensation for services, regardless of your employer, is below market value, is it a reflection of the economic forces at play? We think the fundamental supply versus demand correlation dictates that low rates equate to low demand for professional services. But do they really?

One could postulate that it's not the demand for services that's low, rather the demand for high quality professional services is low. If the minimum is all that is required, why do more? Have we lulled ourselves into complacency in the name of a 'git 'er done' attitude?

We need to ask ourselves who sets the standards? Who is accountable for them? Who checks to make sure they are being met? Are we as an organization mature enough to be professionally reliant and responsible?

In our profession, it is very common for contracts to be awarded based on lowest bid. In my opinion, this has commoditized professionalism and cheapened our practice. We've all eaten at McDonalds and it's fair to say that we can all make a better burger. As forest professionals, I feel it is our responsibility, vis-à-vis our Code of Ethics, to provide more than just fast food treatment towards our forest ecosystems and their management.

I believe that the practice of awarding work based on price alone is punitive and incongruent to the core values of the ABCFP. More often than not, it rewards those who take short cuts. While the folks administering the contracts get a pat on the back from their managers, who get a pat on the back from their managers, the cycle continues. All the while, we have completely driven creativity and ingenuity out of forest management.

I challenge our membership to consider which and how many forest professionals are going to survive these rock bottom rates? Or should I say tough it out? So many disciplines outside of professional forestry require our skill set. In the last four years, I have said goodbye to some really great forest professional who are now plumbers, garbage collectors, taxi drivers, financial advisors, real estate investors and RCMP officers. And I could go on.

Everyone has their reason for change. The ones I spoke to simply couldn't stand the straightjacket environment they felt entangled in. They essentially got bored or frustrated with vanilla boilerplate forestry. Heck, anyone can get a tree to two metres to pass a test.

Corporately, the story is not much different. We are seeing large, long-time consulting firms re-branding themselves and entering into other natural resource fields such as oil

and gas, wind power and mining. Their success and their survival is Darwinian adaptation to the professional environment. The key is that they are being paid fair market value for baseline services and above market value for their innovation once they begin operating outside of forestry. It's brilliant really.

I feel our profession has run amok. Consider the consequences as folks scratch, claw and gouge for what little scraps are at the table during this temporary recessionary cycle. As a professional body, we need to give ourselves permission to think. If you stare hard enough in the mirror you will see the solution. Are we at a point where it's time to open dialogue about what the minimum rate is for a forest professional?

How you do anything is how you do everything. The ABCFP is like any other community in that we are a relationship-based organization. How we as professionals decide to treat each other moving forward is up to us. If we don't value ourselves, no one else will either. 🌱

Garnet Mierau, RPF, is the owner of Linbir Holdings Ltd. and has been an active member with the ABCFP for more than 20 years. He is the publisher of Garnet's Sticks & Stones, a free monthly newsletter that motivates, inspires and educates people wanting to make an impact with their lives. He welcomes all feedback and can be contacted at 250.377.0008 or linbir@telus.net

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