

Memo – Revised 12/21/2014

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American Surveyor Magazine

FROM: Earl F. Burkholder, PS, PE, F.ASCE [eburk@globalcogo.com](mailto:eburk@globalcogo.com)  
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RE: Fox and Chickens Article – Nov/Dec 2014 Issue American Surveyor

While I have great respect for the contributions you have made and are making to the surveying profession and admire your journalistic talents, I am compelled to comment on the Fox and Chicken House article in the November/December 2014 issue of American Surveyor. Although the authors raise some important issues, I feel that the tone of the article should have been less divisive. Ideally the reader should be challenged to a greater level of professionalism but I got the feeling that the authors were attempting to vilify the efforts of other professionals.

I question the article on two counts and I believe you have the ability to affect both. Please understand that what follows is strictly my opinion. Where we disagree, I hope we can do so without being disagreeable.

- First, I believe the Editor of American Surveyor should be more diligent in enforcing appropriate journalistic standards. Admittedly, a trade magazine is not a peer-reviewed journal but, by default, the National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS) has elevated your magazine (and others) to being a credible voice for the profession. As Editor of a successful trade magazine, you have a responsibility you may not have sought. See <http://www.globalcogo.com/Peer-Reviewed.pdf>.
- Second, although the article raises legitimate issues about the importance of land (and boundary) surveying, I believe the quality of those arguments suffer by the authors' use of unsubstantiated generalizations – especially with regard to surveying education and surveying teachers. Having spent 25 years of my professional life teaching surveying at the college level and being involved in ABET accreditation activities, I am personally familiar with many of the surveying (and related) programs and have first-hand knowledge of the dedicated efforts of many surveying educators. Collectively, surveying educators in the U.S. deserve greater respect and support from practicing professionals.

There is much to be done beyond the efforts of editors, protagonists, writers, legislators, and educators. Enhancing the stature and reputation of the surveying profession is a huge undertaking that cannot be done overnight or by one person. No one is good at everything and we all have faults. Can you imagine what might happen if we were able to pool our collective talent for the good of all instead of calling fellow professionals “foxes” and “inmates”? There is nothing I'd like better than to see the surveying profession step up to

the plate and provide leadership in the spatial data community with regard to land ownership rights and responsibilities, collection and evaluation of evidence, appropriate use of technology/measurements, and management of spatial data (manipulation, display, archiving) in support of risk analysis and the decision making process.

As I see it, a number of issues need to be addressed as we collectively strive to meet those challenges.

- We need to recognize that attempting to build a reputation (personal, business, professional, academic, or otherwise) on the foibles of others is futile and counterproductive.
- We need to be more careful in our logic. Too often correlation between events is interpreted as cause/effect. There are many examples similar to the following. It is generally true that most successful surveyors have a 4-year degree. It does not hold that having a 4-year degree will make one a successful surveyor. The same can be said for X years of experience and references. And, quality matters in all three areas. Computers and technicians respond to either/or instructions. Professional excellence is predicated on human judgment and evaluation of many (sometimes intangible) factors.
- I believe it is a mistake to insist that everyone must follow the path to professional stature that “I did.” We each have a different story with respect to how we were able to demonstrate professional competence. Admittedly, some may be “better” than others. That is not the point. The point is that society needs (and deserves) to be served by competent professionals. The existing licensing procedure of accumulating education, experience, and references contains some flexibility and leaves some discretion to individual boards. That is good. Maybe the boards need more discretion – I don’t know. But, I do believe that once the license is earned, it is the individual’s responsibility to remain abreast of technological developments and accepted professional practices. Keeping up is a never-ending challenge or to use an ABET phrase – we all need to engage in “life-long learning.”

FYI, you probably already know that the Fox and Henhouse article has generated quite a discussion on the Surveyor Connect Bulletin Board – see the following two links:

<http://surveyorconnect.com/index.php?mode=thread&id=294639> Fox/Chicken article

<http://surveyorconnect.com/index.php?mode=thread&id=294642> NCEES & model law