

Go the Next Step

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SUMMARY

I believe many surveyors have the desire to know what is over the next hill or round the next corner, that is, they have a little of an explorer in them, They want to go the next step.

The paper will consider the importance of ‘going the next step’ in professional development and further education, in standing up for our professional beliefs and recommendations, our ethics, in being a member of a professional association, in undertaking actual surveys and in generally being a good community citizen.

The author will provide examples of where he didn’t go the next step and where he did.

Being prepared to ‘go the next step’ provides immense satisfaction, particularly when looking back on it, whether it be in ones private life, education, dealings with a client, an ethical dilemma, or in a survey. As surveyors we need to retain some of the explorer in us – to be inquisitive, to look around the next corner or over the next hill.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I present this paper, particularly to the younger members of our profession, who will have many opportunities to 'go the next step'. What do I mean by 'go the next step'? You can put your own interpretation on the phrase, but to me, it means going that little bit further, extending ones self beyond, in some cases, the comfort level that we feel relaxed in. Being prepared to look around the next corner or over the next hill, or over the fence, to do that something you keep saying that you would like to do. Maybe it is to stand up for what you believe in, to assist your chosen profession or others outside your profession, or maybe it is to leave something of value for future generations?

2. THE EXPLORER IN SURVEYORS

I believe all surveyors have at least a little of an explorer in them. I'm not sure if surveyors of today have as much explorer in them as surveyors of old. But I am sure we all often wonder what is around the next corner or over the next hill, and we would take the next step or the extra steps to find out.

I remember being in Indonesia many years ago investigating a possible project, in fact it was my first overseas trip. I had completed most of what I had to do, and had to make a decision as to whether I would return to Australia before a 4 day holiday period or stay on in Jakarta and have a couple of non essential meetings the next week. In the process of trying to determine what to do I was backwards and forwards to a travel agent on the ground floor of the hotel I was in, checking on flights. On one of my visits to the travel agent the Indonesian lady running it suggested I stay the long holiday weekend with her family and join in the celebrations.

I returned to Australia before the holiday period. I wasn't prepared to take up her offer. I did not 'go the next step', and I would have to say I have regretted it ever since.

I believe I learnt from that experience and have been prepared to 'go the next step', and as a result have had some fantastic experiences, particularly in homes of some lovely families – whether it was in Laos, South Africa, Colombia or Collingwood in Melbourne Australia.

3. EDUCATION

Another area where I believe you should be prepared to 'go the next step' is in continuing professional development and further education. I am sure you realise your responsibilities in keeping up to date in matters relating to your work environment. But there is value in going the next step to obtain an additional postgraduate qualification. I am quite convinced that if I

had not taken the step to obtain a business administration qualification, I would never have been a Surveyor General. It would have been very easy for me to have sat back and continued on with what I was doing at the time, but having gone the next step, it certainly has been a very fulfilling, rewarding, and an exciting time that has given me a lot of satisfaction, as well as opening up all sorts of opportunities for me. For example, toponymy - what is it? It is to do with the naming of places. I did not have much of an idea about toponymy 10 years ago, but at a United Nations conference in Geneva in 1996, where I was representing Australia, they were asking for a country to chair a working group. No country volunteered, they asked if Australia would do it. After considering it overnight and further pressure from the Chair I went the next step and it has been the most enlightening experience. That step led to my honorary professor title from the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University in Sydney – but that’s another story.

Being prepared to “go the next step” does not necessarily mean obtaining a further qualification, it could be gaining different work experiences through secondment or acting positions within your organisation

‘Go the next step’ to support our educational institutions, whether it be with feedback on the standard of education of graduating students emerging from our tertiary institutions or being involved with your child’s local primary or secondary school. I am sure we are all aware of the importance of education, not only for the future of our profession, but for the general good health of our society. Be prepared to participate on your school committee or a University’s advisory body, or a similar such board - it can be a very rewarding experience

For those who have gained some experience in their chosen field there is the opportunity of becoming a mentor to the less experienced, particularly to those who have recently joined the work force.

4. PROFESSIONALISM

As surveyors we need to be prepared to stand by our beliefs and to have the commitment to stand up for our recommendations. Having established that they are sound, we need to be prepared to ‘go the next step’ and fight for them if need be.

Recently there was published a book on the life of one of Australia’s early surveyors titled “Robert Hoddle – 1794-1881”, a biography written by Berres Hoddle Colville. Within the 300 or thereabouts pages there are described a number of situations where Hoddle recommended certain action and the ‘powers that be’ didn’t agree, but Hoddle would persist and would eventually succeed – he went the next step. One example is the width of the streets in the central business district of Melbourne, Hoddle recommended 99 feet, the Governor – Sir Richard Bourke (the person with all the power in the new colony) was insisting on 66 feet, as it was a waste of land to have anything wider. Thanks to Hoddle’s vision and persistence we have the wider streets we see in Melbourne today. He had the moral courage to speak up.

So if you believe in something that really is in the long term community interest and your client doesn't agree, be prepared to 'go the next step' and convince your client. This is where our ethics really come to the fore. FIG has one of its publications (No. 17 "Statement of Ethical Principles and Model Code of Professional Conduct") that deals with ethics and a code of conduct that can assist surveyors to achieve a high standard of professionalism.

In our approach to business we need to ensure we 'go the next step' to have a quality organization that recognizes the importance of satisfied customers, whether they be internal or external. Everybody in an organization is both a customer and has customers. FIG has a publication (No. 29 "Business Matters for Professionals") that can assist surveyors to recognize some of the important aspects of having a quality organization.

Being a member of a professional association not only provides the opportunity to share and discuss say ethical dilemmas and share a code of conduct, but also provides the opportunity to be involved in local, national and international activities. Be prepared to 'go the next step', whether it is serving on a local committee or involved with the International Federation of Surveyors. By getting involved it not only assists our profession, but can have flow on effects to people or countries that do not have the opportunities some of us have. For example by me being involved with FIG and the UN led to the planning and organizing of a land policy conference in Mexico for all the countries in the Americas (see FIG publication No. 34 "Aguascalientes Statement – The Inter-Regional Special Forum on Development of Land Information Policies in the Americas").

5. SURVEYING

During an actual survey we might believe we have found enough survey marks, done sufficient measuring to prove a reestablishment or lay out a project, but are we satisfied that we have completed a quality survey. By going the next step to find that extra old mark or take that extra check measurement, or leaving that extra reference mark for future surveyors we can be satisfied we have maintained the integrity of the cadastral system of which we can be justly proud.

Without a good land registration system that is secure and has high integrity the economic development of a country cannot grow, as it should. One of the aims of the World Bank and the United Nations with respect to land administration projects is to ensure there is a land titling system that provides security and integrity, so allowing banks and finance houses to lend monies to land owners to better themselves, thus increasing production, alleviating poverty, and resulting in less importation and ideally leading to exportation.

Because we have in Australia an economic and social infrastructure that works well we often don't associate our responsibilities with such fundamental components of our society. But we all do have such responsibilities. In Australia we think more of the land tenure system and the cadastre which we recognise as being closely linked to our work. I am sure we all recognise the critical importance of maintaining its integrity. Our work through our land tenure system supports and feeds the economic and social infrastructure of our countries.

6. CONCLUSION

Referring back to my earlier reference to Collingwood, there are some situations where going the next step may not be wise. I remember doing a survey of a number of row houses all with party walls. In the back yard of many of them was a grappa still (an illegal alcohol making facility) – where the occupiers insisted on us doing a little sampling before starting on the survey of their property. In that scenario I recommend a late start to the day or better still have someone along to do the sampling for you.

Be prepared to ‘go the next step’ – the satisfaction of doing so will be immense, particularly when you look back on it, whether it be in your private life, your education, dealings with your client, the ethical stand you took, or in a survey – you won’t regret it. As surveyors I would like to think we could maintain some of the explorer in us – be inquisitive, look around the next corner or over the next hill.

As I have indicated we all have a great responsibility resting on our shoulders – the social and economic infrastructure of a country depends to a large extent on its land administration system and you, as surveyors are a key part of that system. But take the weight off your shoulders by enjoying the responsibility you have by going that bit further – “go the next step” in all aspects of your life and get the most out of it.

May I finish with an abridged version of a poem given to me in England. The author is unknown, but the translation from Greek may have been undertaken by Constantine P. Cavafy (1911). It is about Ithaca, the kingdom of Homer’s Odysseus some 3000 years ago – there is conjecture as to whether Ithaca was a real or an imagined place.

“When you set out on your journey to Ithaca,
Then pray that the road is long, full of adventure, full of knowledge ...
Always keep Ithaca fixed in your mind.
To arrive there is your ultimate goal.
But do not hurry the voyage at all.
It is better to let it last long years;
And even to anchor at the isle when you are old,
Rich with all that you have gained on the way,
Not expecting that Ithaca will offer you riches.
Ithaca has given you the beautiful voyage.
Without her you would never have taken the road.
But she has nothing more to give you.
And if you find her poor, Ithaca has not defrauded you.
With the great wisdom you have gained, with so much experience,
You must surely have understood by then what Ithaca means.”

REFERENCES

Cavafy C.P., 1911, Ithaca. <http://users.hol.gr/~barbanis/cavafy/ithaca.html>

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

John Parker is an international land administration consultant specializing in quality management, professional practice and management, waste management and geographical names. He was Surveyor General of Victoria, Australia for nine years and had spent nineteen years in private practice in a multi disciplinary firm. He is active in the International Federation of Surveyors and was chair of FIG Commission 1 (Professional Standards and Practice). Membership of professional associations includes the Institution of Surveyors Australia and Spatial Sciences Institute. Papers have been presented and published at a range of events, including international forums, on a wide range of subjects.

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