

letters

In Name (and Spirit) Only

Thank you for printing and endorsing my comments regarding the lack of recognition by architects of the indispensable contribution of structural engineers to the success of their designs.

However, please note that I am speaking as a *former* principal of the Cantor Seinuk Group. While I am proud of my role in founding and nurturing the Cantor Seinuk Group and watching its continued growth, I left the company in April of 1998 and have no ties—save the sentimental ones—to it.

Irwin Cantor

How to Progress?

There is a very interesting contrast between Erik Nelson's article "The Progression of the Structural Engineer" (March, p. 93) and Xing Cai's arti-

cle "Quality Assurance of Structural Engineering Design" in the March 2008 issue of *STRUCTURE* magazine.

Nelson's article describes a slow, unmentored, hit-or-miss—and therefore error-prone—learning process, while Cai's article recommends the use of checklists to ensure quality and avoid errors of omission.

I repeatedly learned the value of checklists in junior high school shop class, boy scouting, and the U.S. Navy. Engineering schools focus on teaching basic principles, but there is no reason that they cannot also strongly advise their students to obtain or prepare a checklist before designing anything.

I worked briefly as a non-structural civil engineering designer at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) before com-

mencing a career in research. ORNL had an excellent system for accomplishing good design. A program engineer followed the job from concept through construction, preparing—jointly with the customer and the designer—a checklist of criteria that the design should meet. This was the beginning of the designer's checklist. Organized, high-quality work was not left to chance. Checklists contain cumulative corporate knowledge and experience, and can effectively guide a young engineer to recognize the needed knowledge that he/she did not acquire in school. Hit-or-miss, sink-or-swim learning is archaic and should be a thing of the past.

**from the Reader Feedback forum at
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