

The Benefits of ACI for Young Professionals

by Dan Gancarz

What does it take for a young professional to get noticed at work? Is it the number of hours worked? Is it the willingness to do tasks that others don't? Is it the drive to continue learning and advancing? It could be any of these and many others, but continuing to learn is crucial for any young professional. The resources to continue learning and advancing could come from within a company, but a good source that utilizes industry-wide knowledge is a professional organization. For those in the concrete industry, ACI is an excellent organization that provides the tools necessary to succeed. My involvement with ACI on the national and local levels has given me an edge in the workplace.

As an on-site consultant with the Illinois Tollway materials and pavements group, my focus is concrete. More specifically concrete mix designs, specifications, and pavements. The majority of my time is spent in the office reviewing mix designs, submittals, QC/QA data, and assisting with concrete related research that the Tollway supports. The Tollway is currently in the middle of a capital program that has them investing over a billion dollars per year to rebuild, improve, and expand the Tollway system. This volume of construction presents chances for unique engineering solutions and advancement, especially related to materials and concrete.

My involvement with ACI started as a student and now continues as a young professional. Within 6 months of starting my career, I was given the opportunity to attend the Concrete Convention and Exposition in Phoenix and present on the Tollway's use of two-lift composite concrete pavement for the I-90 reconstruction project. It was an amazing experience to present in a session alongside some of the top concrete pavement experts. During the convention, I attended numerous sessions to learn as much as possible.

Beyond the sessions at the convention, I experienced other benefits of ACI including networking, technical committees, and technical documents. There are numerous opportunities to meet new people, make connections, and learn. Technical committees provide the opportunity to share knowledge and contribute to technical documents. There are technical documents on all aspects of concrete. These technical documents can help young professionals learn proper design and construction methods for concrete and avoid the shortcuts or bad practices that certain people try to sell those with limited experience. The convention provides a young professional perspective on how concrete design, specifications, construction methods, and materials are used in different parts of the country and throughout the world.

ACI chapters are another resource to network with colleagues and learn. Dinner meeting presentations are educational and typically focus on local topics. These meetings provide an inviting atmosphere for young professionals to get involved with ACI.

Through my local chapter, I recently started working part-time as a supplemental examiner for the Concrete Field Testing Technician Grade 1 program. As an engineer that doesn't actually perform concrete testing in my full-time job, I find that this work keeps my detailed knowledge of the test methods fresh. It also allows me to interact with engineers and technicians in the concrete industry that aren't necessarily involved with the local chapter.

While the motivation to continue learning is important, a young professional needs support from their employer to realize all the benefits of ACI. This includes financial support to attend conventions, chapter meetings, and access technical documents. It may be hard to justify the expense in the short-term, but the expense needs to be seen as an investment for the future. The more a young professional can learn early on, the more valuable they will be later in their career.

My involvement with ACI on the national and local levels has given me an edge in the workplace. The knowledge I have gained and the connections I have made as a result of ACI have positioned me well for a successful future in the concrete industry.