

What Constitutes a Professional?

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You may have seen or heard my tagline for this year, “Right of way is what you do. Professional is what you are.”

But what exactly is a professional?

According to the dictionary, a professional is defined as someone whose occupation requires extensive education or specialized training; a worker in a paid occupation that has a high degree of skill or competence. According to a thesaurus, a professional is a specialist, expert and/or an authority.

Do you see yourself in this description? I do. I see this in all of our members.

You may have also heard about our vision, “Building the IRWA Brand,” which has been a major focus for the Association this year. Not only was this strategy presented at conference, it has been outlined in past issues of Right of Way magazine. The basic premise is that it’s crucial for us to be recognized externally as the “central authority” for right of way and infrastructure real estate.

What would it take to make the world aware that we are professionals and the central authority? I would answer that question based on four measurement criteria: 1) strength and diversity of our education program, 2) strength of our credentialing, 3) networking opportunities and 4) partnerships.

Based on this criteria, let us see how we stack up:

1) Strong and Diverse Education Program

IRWA has over 50 classroom-based courses, six online courses with more to come, access to hundreds of right of way related courses, as well as business and skill-building courses available online through the Business Training Library. In addition, we accept courses from other associations for recertification credits and encourage our members to participate in numerous seminars and educational events.

2) Strong Credentialing

We have a strong professional development program, which includes our senior designation, the SR/WA, and six certifications, including our new URA certification. Following a thorough analysis by the Designation/Certification Task Force, we are now on the cusp of enhancing our senior designation with a higher level of achievement, more rigorous criteria for success and new leadership and business knowledge requirements. Once underway, our credentialing program will ensure that each person holding this designation meets the most stringent educational criteria.

3) Networking Opportunities

Professionals realize that interaction among likeminded occupations and functions is required to stay current. Talking with peers helps us gain perspective, which is especially critical given the unique situations we face. In response, the Association allocates a great deal of resources to planning and implementing the annual conference and Federal Agency Update, both of which provide education and networking opportunities. Still, the events that deserve the most recognition are the seminars, lectures and luncheons sponsored by our regions and chapters. These are outstanding opportunities to learn and network at the local level.

4) Partnering Here and Abroad

We all know that right of way and infrastructure projects require many different professions working together. For IRWA, it has become critical to partner with other organizations, both here and abroad. Our Federal partnerships, like those with the FAA, FHWA, USACE, BLM and FTA, have gone a long way in helping us share common practices and maximize our resources. We continue to pursue additional joint efforts with the Appraisal Institute, the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, as well as Corporate Real Estate Women, just to name a few. We also benefit from our international affiliations with the Japanese Compensation Consultants Association and the South African Right of Way Association. Earlier this year, we entered into discussions with Australia and New Zealand, and at the annual conference, we met with South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Great Britain and representatives from Uganda.

When we evaluate our ability to be professional and become known as the central authority, IRWA stacks up pretty well against the criteria.

Does being an IRWA member automatically make you a professional? My answer would be no. Based on my own experience, I realize that, without the Association’s offerings in the areas of education, credentialing, networking and partnering, I would not be the best at my profession. In essence, you cannot separate the two.

Always remember, right of way is what you do, and professional is what you are.

