

What is:

The single most pressing issue facing consultants today?



Joe Coates
President
Coates Field Service, Inc.

In my opinion, one of the most pressing issues facing consultants today is simply trying to keep ourselves informed and prepared for the changing legal and regulatory world in which we operate. It seems that ever since the intensely unpopular Kelo decision by the Supreme Court, there has been a marked increase in the amount of proposed and/or passed legislation and regulatory rulemaking involving our industry. I am not just referring to legislation regarding eminent domain of which the stories around the country are legion. Whether any specific individual change is inherently good or bad is not my point. It is the sheer volume of the movement.

Do the laws and rules originate at the state agency level? Federal? County? Municipal? Does it affect natural gas pipelines, electric transmission lines, petroleum lines, DOT projects, interstate projects, intrastate projects, all of the above, one of the above or none of the above. Is the rule aimed at individual right of way professionals or companies engaged in particular business (appraisers for example), or projects of a particular type? What are the latest changes in agency permitting and who

has authority over what and what steps are going to be required to comply? It seems to me that now, as much as ever, having an Association where professionals can meet, discuss and interact over the changing landscape in which we operate is invaluable.



Wade Brown
President/CEO
American Acquisition
Group LLC

From my perspective, it would be the challenges encountered when trying to adapt to change and survive the economic downturn. I believe both go hand in hand, in that current economic times require any business to adapt to a changing world within its own industry. The right of way consultant must acknowledge diminished work opportunities and be able to adjust to different methods of overcoming them.

As consultants, I believe the majority of us recognize the strangleholds our clients face. However, for us to work together to accomplish our respective needs, it is time we think of new alternatives in the way we do business, as well as fulfilling the public need for our services. This can be done through new or added expertise in our services or working together through teaming opportunities.



**Lisa R. Harrison, SR/WA,
R/W-RAC, R/W-NAC**
Principal and President
Pinnacle Consulting Management
Group, Inc.

For my small firm, it is the uncertainty generated by the economic downturn. In a more stable economy, our employees understand and accept that no one really knows where the next project will be. However, in this climate, the added layer of “if” there will be a next project without a gap or “if” the funding for my current project will be pulled is a constant stress factor on everyone involved.

This atmosphere requires flexibility - particularly on where a consultant and their employees are willing to work. This business has always required that agents to go where the work is, but in the past, there had been the ability to target a general area so that people could get home regularly. In addition, agents may have concentrated on a specific expertise, such as URA, pipeline and utilities. Now may be the perfect time to expand into another area.

My solution may be counterintuitive to some; however, I believe that continuing to invest in IRWA membership, particularly designations and certifications, is critical. When there is less work to go around, the best thing to do is to continue to show superior knowledge and service to the client. Even when the firm’s training budget is cut, the individual should invest in himself/herself to increase their value to the firm, as well as their marketability to other consultants and agencies.

Being a member of the Right of Way Consultant’s Council is especially valuable at this

time. As a small company, it has helped me to build relationships with larger firms who share my commitment to high standards. These relationships have provided Pinnacle with subcontracting opportunities on projects that would have been too large for us to tackle on our own.



Kerry Malone
Senior Vice President
Contract Land Staff, LLC

I think the most pressing question we have as consultants today is determining how we can provide our clients in the public and private sectors with the highest and most uniform quality of service possible.

Most service companies pull talent from the same pool (or pools - private and public), with some exceptions of in-house, long-term employees. We, as an industry, must do a better job of providing those employees with job-specific training (through IRWA or other sources), knowledge of established processes and procedures, and the tools needed to provide a consistent level of performance. While this is particularly important for larger projects, it is also critical to the success of smaller jobs and individual assignments. Consultant companies currently approach these issues in a way that is inconsistent, at best.

The Consultant’s Council should lead the way in encouraging its members to better meet the needs of our clients by promoting a level of continuity in our approach to the services we provide.

If you would like to pose a question for a future Consultant’s Roundtable, please email billitzer@irwaonline.org.