

## HAS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**MADE YOU MORE  
COMPETITIVE** IN THE MARKETPLACE?

**Bernard J. 'Ben' Ward**  
Vice President  
Right of Way Sr. Group Manager  
PBS&J

The right of way profession demands that our staff maintain a wealth of knowledge about the overall real estate market, as well as specific project development processes. In years past, right of way agents acquired a vast majority of their skills and knowledge while on the job. Today, our clients expect all of our staff to be fully trained from day one.

Our company has maintained its competitive edge by educating staff and encouraging them to be involved in professional organizations. Professional development activities and the associated networking opportunities have strengthened our corporate presence and enhanced our level of professionalism among both our peers and clients.

Professional development works to build confidence and gives professionals the opportunity to network with important contacts who will support us in a time of need. This lends enormous credibility when dealing with impacted property owners.

The marketplace is constantly changing. IRWA has evolved its education programs and requirements to meet the needs of the right of way professional. And while there are limited number of right of way projects, the general public is becoming much more informed about what we do and the projects we serve.

As advocates of professional development, we can ensure our staff keeps abreast of the changing marketplace, while acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge to remain competitive.



**Neilia LaValle**  
President & CEO  
Paragon Partners Ltd.

I have always been a huge believer in the value of formal education and training. In fact, I began my career as a teacher. When I first transitioned into right of way, I took advantage of the multiple learning opportunities available and found that they greatly enhanced my value and versatility. This path led to larger and more complex assignments that deepened my professional knowledge and increased my confidence to tackle more intricate projects.

When I first started my own business, it quickly became evident that success was heavily dependent on providing the right skill sets to meet specific client demands. Realizing this was something I could not do alone, I recognized the importance of relying on the knowledge and skills of others. Therefore, over the years, professional development has been a key component of Paragon's strategic plan.

Our approach has been multifaceted. We have a continuing education policy that provides reimbursement for courses offered by professional associations or educational institutions. We have also developed several internal courses designed to expand our employees' knowledge of specific areas of the industry. For example, we created a comprehensive in-house program for relocation assistance training that has increased the value our team members bring to those projects. This program has greatly enhanced our ability to respond to new business opportunities.

To address our need for formal project management training, we developed a 40-hour course designed to prepare our project managers to take the PMP certification exam offered by the Project Management Institute. Our organization benefits time and time again by having trained and certified project managers as part of our talent pool.

For a professional services consulting firm, an ongoing commitment to developing talent is critical in creating and sustaining a competitive advantage. I have focused on keeping my own skill sets sharpened, and my commitment to staff development has enabled our company to be successful in a highly competitive marketplace. Providing opportunities for training has also proven to be an effective tool in retaining top talent.



**Randy A. Williams, MAI, SR/WA, FRICS**  
 Managing Director  
 Integra Realty Resources - Austin  
 IRWA International Vice President/  
 Treasurer

The appraisal profession has become highly competitive. The qualifications and designations that I hold, as well as my participation in professional organizations and associations, have allowed me to secure discriminating clientele and differentiate myself from my competitors. Professional development has also broadened me personally.

Leadership skills can be developed in all of us, and IRWA has been invaluable in helping me grow in this area. The tools I have gained through professional development have enabled me to compete at a higher level in the business world. My business includes substantial amounts of litigation appraisal assignments. Such work requires a higher degree of expertise and the ability to defend a report on the witness stand. The attorneys that work with my firm are particularly pleased that I teach courses that address the unique characteristics of eminent domain. My office employs a number of analysts and all are working toward some form of an appraisal designation or certification. In fact, we will not hire an analyst that is not fully committed to such a career path.

Professional development has absolutely made me more competitive in the marketplace. My clientele, both for financial analysis and eminent domain assignments, expect a high degree of professional expertise. The skills and knowledge that I have obtained have directly led to my career and business advancement.



**Teri J. Morgan, SR/WA, R/W-RAC, R/W-NAC**  
 Vice President  
 HDR Engineering, Inc.

In our industry, we are held to strict ethical and moral standards.

Professional development and continuing education programs help keep our industry's workforce informed and aware of the laws and regulations that govern our processes. When we demonstrate proficiency in a particular area and exhibit a high degree of ethical principles, we display the characteristics of a professional.

The emphasis an agency or client places on professional development can vary. Some require their workforce to become licensed or certified for their particular job. In some states, there are laws that require a license for those individuals who receive compensation by commission or hourly pay for any type of real estate related work. And while it may not be mandatory for those in the right of way profession to hold a certification or designation, many employers allocate funding for their employees to take continuing education programs and encourage them to attain their credentials.

Educating its workforce can be the most valuable step a company can take in obtaining and maintaining their competitive edge in the marketplace. Companies that make it a priority to ensure that their staff is highly trained are actually making a commitment to their long-term success. Those professionals who have obtained the industry's certifications and licensing will have a true competitive advantage.

Investing in our staff through ethical training and professional development benefits all of us.