

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

SUBTITLE

I love it when a plan comes together

By Dean Spindler

You may recognize the title of this article as a classic line from the 1980's TV series "The A Team". If you have never seen the show, the A Team were a group of likeable, but misfit, experts in their field.

A major topic in the news these days is the great resignation of people in the workforce, people simply walking away from their careers. If I focus solely on long term hindsight, I have some trouble with the concept of walking away from a career. I had a long, successful career in reclamation, something I chose to focus on midstream as an undergraduate. I ended up four more years older before I actually got hired as a reclamationist. If I look at a more short term hindsight, I can remember several times over my 42-year reclamationist career when I considered exploring, and did explore, my options elsewhere. Most of these options were still reclamation related and included jobs with other divisions in the same agency, jobs in other states, jobs in the federal government, and jobs in the mining industry. The reasons for considering other employment were primarily not feeling the job satisfaction I wanted. That feeling was driven by a variety of things that seemed pressing at the time. For example, a very bad boss, wanting to be challenged and do more than my assigned role, money, or just plain thinking about doing something different, like teaching (my second job passion). You may recall that I have mentioned in a prior article the old Chinese proverb about choosing a job you love and, you will never work a day in your life. I recently read a quote from Warren Buffet with a similar theme as the solution to employee retention. How does this relate to this article title and reclamation? Well here goes!

As a reclamationist, whatever role you may play, have you ever watched over time as a mine went from beginning to end, ultimately fully reclaimed, and knowing you played a part in that? You may have been a permit reviewer that had some difficult decisions to make regarding what to reject and what to accept in the original permit. Your decision making may have been in habitat restoration, groundwater protection, farmland restoration, engineering, or the many other applicable technical fields. Maybe that permit was legally challenged, and you successfully defended your decision. Maybe that mine ended up being a reclamation award winner! As a field representative you may have had a difficult operator that you finally convinced that reclamation planning pays rather than costs in the long run, and they heeded your advice. Or maybe you finally convinced an operator to be proactive with you on problems rather than hide the ball...that ole' cooperative professionalism I have been promoting for years. Another success might be an operator who was not, but now chooses to be, a good neighbor with their adjacent landowners and local groups. Don't forget the old saying associated with Tip O'Neill... "All politics is



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local”. Good relationships between operators and the community almost always pay off. If you are an abandoned mine reclamationist or involved in bond forfeiture you might see a historical problem site now green, our professional favorite color! And in the case of forfeiture, you actually had enough money to get the job done right.

If you are not a field reclamationist but rather a program support person, doesn't it feel good when that new computer database or GIS program works to meet the needs of the agency? By the way, showing off these accomplishments at NASLR by giving talks at the annual conferences and having your peers show interest is a real boost to job satisfaction.

For those of you who are new to our chosen profession, if you have ever planned or seen a new house built, you can identify with this too. You find the lot, lay out the boundaries, draw the floorplan, find a reliable contractor, remove the topsoil, excavate the foundation or basement, build the house, dispose of any excess subsoil, put the topsoil back, and plant trees, bushes, and grass. During the entire process you will have to deal with delays, cost and plan changes, sediment and drainage control, building codes, government inspection, and perhaps disgruntled neighbors upset by a perceived “change” to their life. In 6 months, if all goes well, the property won't look like it did before construction, but it will blend into the local environment and be acceptable to the neighbors too.

Bottom line here is if you can build on the successes of your role in reclamation and find enough job satisfaction for what you currently do, or are lucky enough to have an agency or boss that allows you to expand your horizons (and maybe even pay more!), your plan (career) will come together.



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