

SO YOU WANT TO BE A PROFESSIONAL

Larry Perry

I was reading an article in a writer's magazine the other night and thought to myself that it's context was also pertinent to the surveying profession. I decided to attempt putting the context in an article. I have borrowed quite liberally from the message in the article and attempted to maintain the texture and central idea as pertaining to the surveying profession.

The surveying profession finds the relationship between the pricing of professional services and the image we want to project, that of being a professional, quite difficult. We find it much easier to establish the value of a rifle, boat, house, or truck than we do our services. Those articles we can touch and handle; but, how do you weigh, taste or handle a survey project?

What do you charge for a lot survey, a section break down or the platting of a subdivision? How much time will the research take? How long will it take to find the evidence so that you can begin your field work? Will the evidence found be verifiable with the research done in the office and field? Will the evidence found be acceptable? Will you have to do additional work to verify this data and how much additional survey work and research will be required before you can actually begin the surveying on the client's project? Finally, how much is your time and talent worth?

These are building block considerations that lead to the ultimate two questions: What is the survey project worth to the surveyor? What is the survey project worth to the client? Quite sensibly, most surveyors would like to survey for the big money. But surveyors frequently accept far less than big money for surveying, due to the emotional drive to get out into the field and survey and derive the best possible solution for the project. Surveying for small pay or no pay is self-defeating from so many viewpoints; the foremost among them, the need to make a decent living. But, even more harmful is what this attitude does to the client's perception of the survey itself. People value what they pay for, the more they pay, the higher their regard for the purchase; and vice versa. Money is negotiable appreciation.

The price that the surveyor sets for his or her work often influences the client's regard for that work. I once overheard a conversa-

tion during a construction project. The client was reviewing the work of a site survey, looking for the corners and control points set by the surveyor. The corners and points were found after considerable searching, and the contractor looked at the client and said, "what do you expect for a hundred dollar survey?"

Experience, expertise, skill, productivity and acceptability were overshadowed by the price that the surveyor had sold himself for. So what is a fair price? Charging by the acre, corner or monument is impractical, even establishing the fair value of the total project, survey or plat is a challenge because the surveying projects are so variable as to the amount of research and verification of points in the field. A surveyor may size up a survey assignment, consider it a piece of cake, and quote a price based on a cut-and-dried survey and draw-it-up venture. However, when doing the field search or doing the required research in order to do the actual survey or plat, an unconsidered aspect of the undertaking may become apparent and suddenly, the time necessary to overcome these complications multiplies and the surveyor finds himself working at or below minimum wage.

A surveyor's fee should meet one criterion; it should be high enough so that the client knows that he or she is dealing with a seasoned, successful professional who can be expected to turn out a first class surveying job. With a substantial investment in the outcome, the client has a vested interest in the success of the arrangement and is more likely to focus on the strengths, instead of looking for flaws in the final product.

Money also plays a vital role in establishing the image of success. It's the, "If he's getting that much money, he must be good" syndrome. Money equates with success; success equates with money; and they both equate with acceptance. If you value your work, others are more likely to value it as well.

Doctors, lawyers, engineers and other professionals get paid for their experience and knowledge, why not surveyors? Academia is not the answer. Requiring any number of degrees will not give the surveyor the professional standing in society or the community until the surveyor acts, dresses and charges for services rendered

like a professional.

When a surveyor stakes out a building on a construction project, does the surveyor receive the same monetary remuneration as the laborer that cleans up the site after construction is complete? When a lot survey is performed, does the surveyor get paid as much as the grading contractor gets for doing the finish dirt work? When a boundary survey is done, does the surveyor receive a fee comparable to what is paid to the attorney that reviews the conveyance and transaction contract? If not, then ask yourself, "Could the conveyance of land have taken place without this survey? Could this building be constructed in its proper location without the survey?"

If the answer to these last two questions is no, then the survey is of considerable significance. Surely your endeavor is worth more than the grading contractor's or the attorney's, for without the surveyor's contribution, there would be no project for them to do. The surveyor locates the land, describes the parcel, and monuments it for future generations; nothing can happen until the survey is complete. Surveying is crucial to any land transaction or construction project. The majority of attorneys can read a description and some may even possibly write one, but can they go out and physically show where these boundaries are situated? The chances of an attorney being able to do this are remote at best. So the surveyor should be appropriately compensated.

If you want to be a professional, you must charge a fee that is commensurate with the service rendered. If you want to be thought of as a subprofessional or a labourer, then charge accordingly. The choice is yours.

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