

On Brain Drain in Engineering Profession-Er. Ong Ser Huan IES Past President, QEC & M&E RE/RTO Registries Chairman

Now I wish to touch on a very relevant development concerning our engineering industry.

During the last 2 years, there are more and more engineering breakdowns and incidents. There were cases after cases of the lifts incidents. Then, came the never ending SMRT breakdowns.

As we in engineering fields are fully aware, one major cause is for the past over 30 years, we have not given enough emphasis to attract the best brains into engineering. It has not been the profession of choice ever since.

We know that engineering degrees or diplomas are among the toughest to pass. There are at least 6-8 subjects every year for 3 to 4 years. After graduation, they are the lowest paid among their cohorts in laws, medicine, accountancy, banking, architecture, etc.

The chief engineer's office is always in the basement, or next to the plant room. It has never meant to be posh.

The grouses have no end. To make things worse, engineering services and even inspections, have been taken as a commodity and subject to cut throat price competition. You pay peanuts, you get monkeys. When you pay rotten peanuts for too long, even monkeys also disappear.

Having said that, though at these very tough conditions we are in, we must still realise that no one owes us a living. When we take on a job, we still have to get it properly done to the best of our ability. It is a matter of time, instead of getting right to the root to solve the problem, as usual, they will first get tough and make some heads rolling. So, be very alert. If the price is too low, do not take it. If we take it on, we must physically get it done, and not just sign the pump checklist without checking whether the pump is working, like what happened recently.

Do not send only 1 man to service the lift as we know that it is not possible for one man to do the job, or the lift will continue to malfunction, causing troubles or even harms to the users.

If the price or the pay is too low, don't take it. If we have to do other things, go ahead. Some may say that it is easier said than done; however at our present stage of advanced economy and with our engineering trained logical mind, it is not difficult to move on to other trades. Just do not take the risk to take on engineering job and cut corners. Going forwards, they are most likely to first catch some scapegoats and chop off their heads to try save their own rice bowls.

So, play smart and don't get caught for nothing. Just hold your position well; I believe it is at the end of the tunnel and hopefully we shall see some lights soon.

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