



Mega Issue Dialogue

The Questions:

How can SWE further assist our unemployed members?

What role can the COR play in this issue?

Providing value and benefit to SWE members is one of the Society's strategic priorities. SWE does an excellent job of preparing our engineering students for the workplace and provides numerous networking opportunities for our professional members; however, SWE could do more to assist our members while unemployed and provide better career planning skills and services. Corporate staff reductions and voluntary separations from work resulting in extended periods of unemployment is a reality in an engineer's career that must be planned for. Our Professional Development activities tend to focus upon developing work related skills and preparing our members for roles in corporate leadership and management. This is certainly appropriate, but we are doing our members a disservice if we neglect to provide them the opportunity to learn the necessary skills to help them succeed in finding a new employment and manage the life changes encountered during unemployment?

The proposed goals and outcomes of this dialogue include: 1 – Provide feedback on the content and relevance of the white paper, 2 – Provide additional input to the two questions below (What can SWE do? and What can the COR do?), 3 – Provide additional input to the four Mega Issue questions listed below and 4 – Formalize this dialogue with a motion to request action of the Board, HQ and/or the COR as appropriate.

What can SWE do?

- Offer workshops at conferences and on the SWE website for our unemployed members searching for new jobs. Topics could include “How to Network”, “Working With Headhunters”, “Organizing a Career Search”, “Gathering Information for Resumes”, and “Cover Letters that Get Results”.
- Offer workshops at conferences and on the SWE website for our unemployed members thinking about starting their own business including: “Running a Home Based Business”, “Business Accounting”, “Business Taxes” and “Incorporating a Business”
- Provide downloadable presentations of career planning workshops.
- Create web forums specifically for our unemployed members.
- Provide downloadable forms that will help unemployed members organize their career search.
- Invite career counselors or outplacement counselors to present workshops at the National Conference.
- Form alliances with other engineering societies that would permit sharing of resources.
- Encourage companies who host student receptions at conferences to host similar receptions for professional members.

- Encourage unemployed members to attend the National and Regional Conferences by reducing some of the Conference expenses.
 - Reduce registration fees offering a reduced registration rate to unemployed members.
 - Create an endowed fund (similar to a scholarship fund) that could be used to pay for all or part of the conference fees for unemployed members.
 - Provide a roommate locator service unemployed members.
- Provide career tracking forms on the SWE website for professional members.
- Create workshop packages similar to the SWE Section Vitality Packages so sections can conduct workshops for local section members.
- Stress to members the importance of being financially and emotionally prepared for periods of unemployment.
- Repeat the message that unemployed members need SWE more than ever during periods of unemployment. 80% of all jobs are found by networking!
- **Others?**

What can the COR do?

- Request and encourage the Board and HQ to take action on this issue. This issue is a suitable topic for the SWE Professional Development Committee.
- Provide valuable member input to the Board, HQ and Professional Development Committee. In addition to sharing experiences, COR members should be willing to share contacts, information, and their own time.
- Provide members to assist the Board and HQ in the preparation of materials
- Serve as a sounding board for any actions taken
- Encourage all sections to provide any career planning information they have to the Board and HQ.
- **Others?**

To conduct this dialogue, we need to identify what we know in relation to the issue at hand. To do this, we must answer the following four questions relative to the Mega Issue question:

1. What do we know about the needs, wants and preferences of our members, prospective members and customers relevant to this discussion?

- Members want SWE to provide good career planning services.
- Members want to learn new career planning skills and strategies.
- Our members need to keep good records of their achievements while employed. SWE can help our members maintain those records.
- Our members want to differentiate themselves, but this can be difficult to do and they may not know how.
- Some members know that it can be difficult to navigate the various roadblocks and gatekeepers that keep job seekers from talking directly to hiring managers.
- SWE members want to share their strategies and successes with other members.
- SWE's National Conference is one of best networking opportunities available to members, but it is also quite expensive. Unemployed members would like some assistance so they can attend the National Conference.
- Members do not want to feel that is a disgrace to be unemployed.
- Many of our members would prefer not to relocate to where the jobs are.
- Some members are uncomfortable speaking about their accomplishments.
- Some members are not skilled at marketing themselves.

- Promoting one's skills and accomplishments is an art that can be learned.
- Women can be very successful at starting and running their own businesses.
- Some jobs require security clearances. For a job that does, you have an active clearance, or recent clearance, from a previous job. You cannot get a clearance while you are unemployed (unless you join the military).
- Corporate HR offices are flooded with resumes. It is difficult for them to sift through all the resumes to find the qualified candidates.
- Employers want qualified employees with the proper skills.
- Employers want to hire skilled women engineers.
- Some of our corporate sponsors may be willing to provide some career planning advice to SWE members.
- **Others?**

2. What do we know about the current and evolving dynamics of our profession relevant to this discussion?

- There are far more job seekers than there are job openings.
- The loss of a job can happen to anyone; there are few stable engineering jobs anywhere.
- The 2003 unemployment rate for women in Architecture and Engineering occupations was 6.6%, up from 5.0% in 2002. For women in computer and mathematical occupations the rate was 4.6% in both 2002 and 2003.
- Layoffs, mergers, bankruptcies, acquisitions, product obsolescence and outsourcing can all result in the loss of your employment.
- Many organizations, head hunters and job hunting sites have agendas that do not necessarily help job seekers.
- There is bad information about conducting employment searches, search strategies and even false job ads on the Internet and elsewhere.
- **Others?**

3. What do we know about the strategic position and internal capacity of our organization relevant to this discussion?

- Providing value and benefit to SWE members is one of the Society's strategic priorities.
- SWE has limited funds for professionally generated documents, printing and postage
- SWE has a smaller professional staff than other organizations (eg: IEEE, ASME, AIChE).
- Most SWE activities provide excellent networking opportunities.
- SWE is largely a grass-roots organization. Providing curricula and workshop materials that can be used at the section level would most likely be well received by sections and members as well.
- SWE offers discounted membership rates to unemployed members.
- The SWE website is an excellent resource. It could be used to provide career-tracking forms, job search tracking tools and general information about job searching. That would be an inexpensive way to make information available to all members.
- **Others?**

4. What are the ethical implications of our choices relevant to this discussion?

- SWE is dedicated to encouraging women to attain high levels of technical achievement. Because periodic unemployment is becoming more common in the

- careers of our members, SWE needs to help our members develop good career planning and job search skills so they can continue their achievements.
- There may be many benefits for SWE if we share resources with other organizations.
 - SWE may be able to keep more members from dropping their memberships by providing better career planning services.
 - SWE will be able to increase its visibility in the engineering community.
 - If we decide to offer discounted convention fees to our unemployed members, we will need a way to assure that the member receiving the discount is actually unemployed.
 - **Others?**