

things i've learned

Humble Observations from a Life in Practice



A lifetime dream comes true. Ascending the north bell tower of Chartres Cathedral (France), height at top: 371 feet.

PHOTO BY RICH LEU

“**K**ee a sense of humor”. In the March, 2014 issue of *American Surveyor* magazine, surveyor/attorney Walter Robillard quoted, then expanded on surveyor/President George Washington’s youthful reflections regarding some words to live by. Some of my personal favorites from Mr. Washington:

- *Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience.*
- *Never attempt to palliate your own foibles by exposing the error of another person.*

Some of my favorites from Mr. Robillard:

- *Never stop learning.*
- *Read, read, read, anything and everything from all points of view.*
- *Keep a sense of humor.*

“**W**oe be unto me to rank myself to a level of President George Washington or the honorable Walter Robillard.”

- *What it means to be absolutely certain about the truth. . . Wait, next time you see Walt, ask him.*

Woe be unto me to rank myself to a level of a President George Washington or the honorable Walter Robillard. Nope, I tend to traverse a territory somewhat south of the Pope but a little north of a person that can look another person in the eye and say “If you like your Doctor, you can keep your Doctor.

Period (Ironic disclosure: Because our survey company is composed of mostly dinosaurs or pre-dinosaurs, our company premiums declined 45%—this year. The young folks across our country provide the subsidy). I offer to all of you some of the humble contributions and humble observations I’ve garnered over a 35+ year period measuring dirt. This list formally began in 2002 and will continue, with each mistake I make and each boneheaded action I observe from day to day. So bear with me and let me reflect.

1. If your Chapstick tube tends to mush up in the cap, simply reverse the position of the tube in your pocket by 180 degrees or just switch the pocket you carry it in.
2. Once you are a licensed professional, you lose all right to blame anyone other than yourself.
3. Document, document, document or as my old boss used to say: “document, document, document”.
4. As a surveyor, know the law but never practice the law. Read the law. Learn to research the law and read the reported cases.
5. Respect all of the associates you deal with in your day to day practice. Respect the rodman the same as the multi-millionaire developer.
6. Never, ever sign the other fellow’s contract. Make him sign yours or come to an agreement somewhere in the middle. After all, a contract is *mutual* agreement between two parties.
7. Don’t trust or rely on spell-check. “Beginning at a pimp . . .”
8. Take all of your telephone calls and return all of your telephone calls post haste.

9. Does anyone reading this know of an expensive mistake, law suit or lost client that was not the direct result of poor communication? This is so very, very important. Learn to listen. Listening, not simply hearing, is a developed art. Learn to do it. Then, strive to deliver clear and concise instructions and explanations to a listening audience.
10. You will *never* commit a mistake that will not be found out. In the inevitable case of a mistake or error, be the first in line at the full disclosure table. Fess up. Loudly and proudly proclaim your error(s) and faults to the world.
11. The survey is always on the ground. The survey happens in the field. What you deliver to your client is merely a report of the survey. Research is essential but only supports the survey.
12. Never place yourself in the position where you don't know absolutely every aspect of your surveys, business or investments, especially where ever-changing technologies are concerned.
13. Gamble a little every now and then.

“...the absolute purpose for the survey is to perpetuate the corner... This is why surveyors populate the earth.”

14. Once a year, maybe during your birthday month, change your smoke alarm batteries and then read: a) A.C. Mulford's *Boundaries and Landmarks*; b) Justice Cooley's dictum *The Judicial Functions of Surveyors*; and c) *Riley, administratix etc v. Griffen et al* 16 GA 141 (1854).
15. In the field, seek monumentation for two days. Measure for two hours. If a corner is set based on a numeric derivative only, the surveyor has failed in his or her responsibilities and duties to the public. Numbers within a deed or on a plat are nothing more than finger pointers. Mathematics is, to a poor surveyor, just what cocaine is to a dopehead.
16. In any survey office or in any survey related communication: *No Pronouns*.

Smith sold his lot to Jones, then he moved his fence over on his property. I measured over to it and what they said was right except it's not on his property. What??

17. Lawyers are no different from the rest of humanity. Many can be good, ethical people and many can be a good friend. Disregard and ignore the jerks just the same as you would a rabid dog or smelly rancid meat.
18. In the course of the survey or on the drawing or report of the survey, the absolute most essential purpose for that survey is to *perpetuate the corner* (and to protect the public). This is why surveyors populate the earth. Be creative; try means of perpetuation other than math. Tie to something substantial that won't be easily

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destroyed and will be capable of defying bull dozers. Think permanency.

19. Keep your remote in your spouse's hands. If you need to change channels or adjust the volume, the exercise will do you good.
20. If one decides to pursue higher education, do it for the knowledge and definitely not for the degree.
21. Never commit to paper (or electronic medium) *anything* that has not been verified and you have proof of its truth. If the field guys say "18" CMP", make sure they put a ruler to it and the damn thing isn't made of concrete. Assuming and guessing are for sissies and folks that watch figure skating and eat cotton candy.
22. Ethics and Professionalism 101. If you get a call about working on a project that you know another surveyor has been involved on: a) Tell the potential client you are going to call the other surveyor. b) Call the other surveyor and find out what's going on. c) Do not take the job if fees have not been paid. d) Spread the word.

23. It is sometimes inconvenient and maybe a little corny but try to do your duty to God and country, to help others at all times, to keep yourself physically strong, mentally awake, morally straight, and to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, reverent and do a good turn daily but most especially, be prepared. (Boy Scout Handbook; many editions)
24. Share your data and files with other surveyors always. Share your data and files with realtors and strangers only if they pay a premium price. We are a service industry, in the information business. Information, no matter the media, is our only product.
25. Always seek to find the solution to the problem; nothing is ever gained in wasting time finding a culprit. Life is too short and you'll just anger someone.
26. Start your tomato and pepper plants indoors before the first of March.
27. A survey is never finished until you know you have the very last recoverable evidence in your grasp. Should

something substantial surface after the fact, gladly revise your survey and inform all parties involved.

28. Coming from a fellow with shoulder length hair and a scraggly beard, a necktie never hurts when parading about in public representing land surveyors.
29. And most importantly, keep a sense of humor.

Please, not for a minute, believe the author lives up to these standards day to day. No, it's a wish list. What we do is called a practice. The implication of that is, we don't fully know what we're doing in our chosen profession day to day. We're not surveying, we are just practicing our science. By practicing, we can never become complacent in our pursuit of perfecting our skills and knowledge. Let's all hope we all learn something new tomorrow and then again on the next day. And then again, the next. ■

Bart Crattie becoming an old fart day by day but still enjoys "measuring dirt" immensely and looks forward to demonstrating shoulder mounted artillery (a blunderbuss) at the 2014 Surveyors Historical Society Rendezvous in Mobile, Alabama this coming September.

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