



## Remembering a young engineer who 'got it'

**O**n April 11, we tragically lost one of our most promising young bridge engineers. He collapsed while playing soccer. Qualified medical personnel immediately performed CPR, but he didn't pull through. Aaron Roth was 23.

Aaron stood out among the many young engineers I've met and interviewed. He was part of a group that some people call the "Entitlement Generation," but you didn't get that vibe from Aaron. He was driven and he seemed to understand that he'd have to work hard to get what he wanted out of his career and his life.

Aaron was never late to the office and he was diligent about meeting project deadlines. When given an assignment, he met each challenge eagerly and without fear or the "can't-do" attitude that some young professionals seem to have.

Fair or not, his generation — also known as Generation Y or the Millennials — is characterized as being needy, demanding, and requiring instant gratification. It didn't take long for us to see that Aaron wasn't like that at all. He was "old school."

Aaron knew he needed more education and was pursuing his Master's degree. We often found him working on his schoolwork after hours at the office.

When we interviewed him, we said that being a successful bridge engineer required passion and in-depth knowledge of both design *and* construction. We told him that once you were hooked on big bridges, you would never get it out of your system, that being a bridge engineer was a lifelong passion. Aaron embraced these ideas, and every action he took from that point forward showed us that he intended to follow the path we envisioned for him. He immediately understood and believed in our philosophy: Have some fun; do something that you can be proud of; and at the end of the day, go home safely and share this with your loved ones.

Aaron showed such impressive abilities that his level of responsibility on projects grew at an unusually fast pace. This put him in position to work on some of our most interesting and exciting projects. He expressed great appreciation of these opportunities and, I believe, felt a tremendous amount of satisfaction with each completed task.

Aaron was with us for only about a year, but it should be obvious to you that he made quite an impression on us all. Not surprisingly, as we learned more about Aaron's life outside of the office, we found that he exhibited the same integrity and maturity that he showed at work.

I had other plans for this column, but after living through this terrible event and seeing such a promising life and career cut so short, I decided to tell you about Aaron because he was a young engineer who got it. Many of you know what I mean by "it." If you don't, then chances are, you're still among the many engineers who don't get it.

Engineers who get it — especially younger engineers — realize that what they learned in college only prepared them to *begin* the learning process of what it takes to become an accomplished, successful engineer. They respect the experience and knowledge of the more seasoned people in the business and desperately try to acquire as much of that valuable information as they can.

Engineers who get it understand that being an engineer is about much more than the technical aspects of the job. It's also about delivering what's best for the client and what gets a project from A to B in the best, most efficient, and economical way.

Engineers who get it look for solutions that might not be the most obvious or comfortable. Some call this "thinking outside the box." I call it doing your job. (As an aside, we recently attended a conference where an attendee said, "Thinking outside of the box is not what we want; *doing* outside of the box is what we want." How true.)

Engineers who get it realize that it's important to present themselves well — from the clothes they wear to their personal hygiene to the way they speak and write. Many brilliant engineers are stuck in a career quagmire because they don't understand — or refuse to accept — that these factors are every bit as important as technical ability in professional growth.

Our industry needs young engineers like Aaron, and I'm optimistic that there are more like him out there. As we continue to look for new, young talent — and even some not-so-new, not-so-young talent — I'll keep Aaron's attitude and commitment in mind as examples of what our company wants and needs in its engineers.

Aaron Roth's potential was limitless, but he wasn't perfect and he had a lot to learn. What made Aaron different from many of his colleagues in this profession — young or otherwise — is that he knew it. ▼

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