

AS THE NAME OF IEM ANY COMMERCIAL VALUE?

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A friend threw the above question at me one fine afternoon at a sidewalk café in Mont Kiara. He was downing a tall velvety café latte "with a good head on it." I could only manage measly RO water "sourced from Perbadanan Urus Air Selangor." That was what the fine print on the bottle read. If you are a rat racer yourself, you shouldn't have hesitated for a second to declare that he was the clear winner. Hey, wait a second. My choice of drink was better. It had a positive effect on health, longevity and libido, which are all priceless. And therefore, it was I who derived the most value for my money! Got the picture, brother/sister?

We were engaged in a friend-meets-friend bare-all-that-is-in-your-chest argument on a potentially seditious topic: "The Engineer's Ability – Natural and/or Developed – in Identifying a Commercial Opportunity, and Turning it into Money-making Reality." Quite a mouthful; but the topic was clearly unfair to me. I was an engineer; and he wasn't.

This friend was making a point. And in the process, he craftily turned me into his lab rat. On sensing my hesitation, apparently not wanting to embarrass me, he went on to declare an emphatic 'yes' to his own question. "Pew, that was close," I cried a sigh of relief – in muted silence.

For someone who isn't an engineer, whose wife, father and mother aren't engineers, and furthermore, whose children in college aren't pursuing

engineering degrees; this friend was one audacious guy talking like that to an engineer – who happened to take great pride in practising "modesty is best policy." When I say this, my mind is acutely focused on how an engineer understands the guidelines with regards to the advertising of professional services. They don't seem to be in keeping with the wisdom of the advertising industry, which seems like "if you got it, flaunt it."

I would describe this friend as "caustic every now and then." This is because he is straightforward to a fault. I don't believe that this is a natural or acquired trait characteristic of a financial professional, which he is. If I may hazard a guess: this certainly isn't one of a typical engineer either. It certainly isn't mine though.

Anyway, I use this friend as a convenient yardstick for evaluating the many good things in life including an engineer's market worth, and the "degree of attractiveness" of an engineering career. I don't have to tell you if he is better off or I am; you could easily interpret it from our choice of drink. You could also easily imagine the make of his car if I were to tell you that mine is a Honda Accord. Ignore the year of its manufacture; you can't be far wrong.

If I may digress a little further, styles don't count all that much when you are mostly concerned with functionality, safety and economy. What was my wardrobe like when I was a college

student? I had two pairs of jeans and a pair of sneakers that I brought from Malaysia. A pair of boots and a bomber jacket that I picked up from an army surplus store near my college. A long-sleeved shirt, and a tie that my uncle gave me as a present. And, yes, a pair of track suits that I won in a cross-country competition. The rest comprised a very modest number of t-shirts, underwear and socks that I bought during sales at a variety of shops. Like other engineering students (well, most of them), I didn't care a hoot if fellow students in finance donned dark pinstriped 3-piece suit when they attended lecture.

What does an engineer care about image anyway? He or she has enough trouble appreciating why a river should not be so straight like a ruler, and its cross-section, not be trapezoidal, let alone indulging him or herself in the fine art of graceful living styles. Does an engineer know that the American ties his necktie differently compared to the British? Don't stretch your luck, brother/sister. An engineer may be deficient in taste, but not in perceiving an innuendo.

Now, just where is this discussion leading us to? Well, like you, I am not at all too sure what does this mean when it comes to attracting the brightest minds among our youths to the engineering profession. But from the above argument, you could perhaps corroborate that those who appreciate functionality and economic efficiency the most would naturally gravitate to becoming engineering candidates. I didn't say "those who are the most sloppy."

Do I sound as though I regretted being an engineer? I may sound so to you, but I definitely do not. I have no such regrets. Quite the contrary, I think I feel so blessed that I am one; now more so than ever – only that I wished the imperfect market has been much