

A Renewed Thought on Professional Societies

I would like to thank the members of the IEEE Control Systems Society (CSS) for giving me the opportunity to serve in 2013 as its 47th president. It is a great honor and privilege, and I will try my best to respect the traditions and maintain the high standards set by my predecessors.

In starting my first column, I would like to share some thoughts on the role and value of our very Society, the CSS. To begin, let me pose a very bold, even wild, question: *What is the value of a professional society, and why do we wish to belong to it?*

DO I HAVE TO BE A MEMBER OF THE CSS?

The reader is most likely a member of the CSS, so this question may appear somewhat senseless. It is not quite explicitly posed among us, probably because of its trivial appearance. Nonetheless, we inevitably encounter this question from time to time. Let me describe two cases.

Case I

You are a professor and advise your students to become a member of the IEEE and CSS. You may argue that it is an important Society and very valuable to obtain information through it. Members can get subscriptions to the transactions and *IEEE Control Systems Magazine*; they can submit papers to the Society. Some students may, however, ask you a nonchalant question: "Professor, we can get all the necessary information through the university library, read articles, and attend the



Christos Cassandras (2012 CSS president) and Yutaka Yamamoto at the IEEE Technical Activities Board Meeting, June 30, 2012.

Society conferences without becoming a member. We can also get most information through a Google search. What is the true benefit of becoming a member?"

You may say that the members can enjoy various member benefits; for example, they can get discounted rates for conferences, student-discounted membership fee, etc., etc. This argument may not convince your students. They probably know that you will pay for their conference registration fee anyway. *Why should students spend their own money to become a member?* Even if a student agrees to join the Society, the question remains: When students graduate and leave academia to go into industry or a government laboratory, why should they bother to stay a member of the Society? Answering these questions does not seem to be trivial.

Case II

You are a research scientist, working in an R&D center of a private company. You have been a CSS member for more than ten years since graduation. You always thought it was valuable to keep the membership to obtain necessary information, although not so much in a specific way. A recent reorganization of the company necessitates a change of your position to a nonresearch section. *What is the value of keeping your membership since you are no longer in a technical position?* After all, you can get necessary information almost always through a Web search, and you can still publish your paper as a nonmember. I did indeed encounter this case as president of the Institute of Systems, Control, and Information Engineers, Japan, for the years 2008–2009, and found it not easy to convince otherwise. When some

people are in the mood of confining themselves to their job, what kind of logic can convince them? He or she will be away from a research section. He/she will not be writing a paper, and there will be no need for reading the forefront of the latest developments of the field. *Then what good is continuing a membership in CSS?*

Of course, being a member of a professional society like the CSS has many advantages. You can get a member discount; have a subscription to journals, which is handy; submit a paper; attend a conference; meet people, etc., etc. But as stated above, these may not be entirely decisive factors by themselves. My simple answer is that belonging to a society means that you can belong to a community that suits you, and this expands the horizon of your life. Is this answer simple? Yes. Is this answer too simplistic? Maybe. But I think this is an important aspect. Let me try to elaborate.

THE NEED OF BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY

If you are in academia, this need is relatively simple to see. You will interact with your colleagues, not only in your institution, but in a much wider community—all over the world. These interactions will cer-

tainly enrich your academic life. Your work will be more widely appreciated and accepted. You can also work as a volunteer for the Society, and this will even enlarge your own perspective in life. You will have the opportunity to learn a different aspect of life, in how certain things operate and function. In five to ten years, you would realize that you have become a different person, with wider views on life and a more enriched lifestyle, more confidence in what you are doing, and more skills for handling the difficult problems that inevitably will come to you from time to time. Can all of this be accomplished without belonging to a society? Also, if you attend conferences (in our case, the Conference on Decision and Control and the Multiconference on Systems and Control), why not belong to the pertinent community? You will be more appreciated, and in a sense, you will be “in” the Society. A more intimate relationship can be established.

VERSATILITY

As stated above, versatility is an asset derived from a community like the CSS. You can meet and interact with many individuals with different backgrounds, from different regions of the world. In fact, the IEEE and of

course the CSS are now much more internationalized, which has become quite prevalent in the past ten years. Although the IEEE started as a professional society in the United States, surprisingly, fewer than 50% of the members are now from the United States. In the case of the CSS, it is even more prevalent: Fewer than 40% of all members are from the United States. This reflects the versatility of our own Society. I am the first Asian president of the CSS; it may have been almost unimaginable 20 years ago.

GOING FORWARD

You may have seen by now why belonging to a community like the CSS is so valuable, not only for people in academia but also for people in private sectors. The CSS is open to all who are interested in its technical areas. Through this community, you can be exposed to ample opportunities and to many different ideas, the stimuli of which will ultimately affect your life positively.

I hope I have been convincing in the importance of CSS membership, and I also hope that you can convince your students and colleagues about the value of the CSS. But there is a saying, “seeing is believing.” So, if you are a professor, please bring your students to our conferences and help them experience what the CSS is really like. This is a great Society and brings a lot of opportunities. After all, every human being is a social creature, and one cannot live without belonging to some sort of community. *Why not choose one that is so close to your own profession and heart?* It will surely make our life more versatile, fruitful, and probably robust.

I would like to close this column by inviting the readers to send feedback, comments, suggestions and ideas on activities of our Society. I can be reached at yy@i.kyoto-u.ac.jp.

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Yutaka and his wife Mamiko with other participants at the Uwe Fest in Melbourne, Australia, in July 2012.

