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Dr. Z's Corner

Time Really Flies – Especially When You Are Having Fun

Unbelievably AY-2016–2017 has just started. Time goes by so fast. Some of you may know I am just back from my semester-long sabbatical leave. For the last thirty years in academia, thanks to my students' resistance, I had never dared considering a leave until this past semester. As a tenured professor, I was told, I was eligible to take paid sabbatical leave at least four times in three decades, but no regrets.

Here is a brief account of my break. During my break, while charging my batteries, I never missed my monthly NCS articles of Dr. Z's Corner. I also continued preparing dozens of original problems for our readers every month. Not only that, I was also at school almost every Saturday to make sure I run our now well-known pro-bono Saturday classes for the students from various universities and also practicing engineers in the metro area. I was really having fun since we have helped scores of engineering students and engineers for free. And one of them was Diego Buitrago, a structural engineer from Washington, DC. His story was truly inspirational:

Dear Dr. Z,

I just received the great news. Yes, I conquered the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) engineering exam on my first try. As a fresh graduate, I would like to thank you for your continued support and mentorship. I also would like to thank to NCS for the "Dr.Z's Corner" for providing hundreds of problems for free for the students and engineers who are preparing to take their FE and PE exams. Your pedagogy, your examples and your pro-bono Saturday sessions made a huge difference and believe it or not you have changed my life Dr. Z.

For other students who are interested in passing these exams, I have to tell them my story, how I met you and how I joined your exciting free Saturday classes at UDC? First, let me start from the beginning:

I came to U.S. from Colombia in August 2013 and I had set three important goals for myself. To work hard and be a great Structural Engineer, finish the master's degree, pass the FE and PE exams and hopefully be my own boss one day.

You may not remember but in spring 2014, I had the opportunity to meet with you, Dr. Z at Howard University. You were a guest speaker at our research seminar that I attended. You gave to us an unforgettable presentation about "How to inspire, motivate and educate engineering students and how to conquer the FE and PE exams?" You also shared with us some stories of your personal life. I was especially impressed with your first two weeks in this country and your experience with homeless people on the streets of Washington, DC. At that point, for sure you were my hero and my role model. For the first time since I came to the U.S. I felt identify with a person that I could see as a very positive influence on me. By that time, I thought I had difficulties but that was nothing compared to your experience. No doubt, this gave me hope and inspiration to be successful in my career as a structural engineer.

At the end of summer 2015, my master's degree requirements were partially completed and I joined your pro-bono Saturday classes that you have been offering at UDC. During the first three months, I studied and prepared for the FE exam based on the

information and class notes from you. I followed your every advice to conquer the FE exam and I literally solved all the exercises available at Dr Z's Corner given in the NCS' website. I want all other students to know that ASCE-NCS website is a great source with hundreds of original problems and costs nothing, it is absolutely free.

Immediately after passing the FE exam, I also received a job offer from a world renowned structural engineering company in San Francisco, California.

I consider myself very fortunate that I met you at the right time Dr. Z. You have already changed my life. I cannot thank you enough, I am eternally grateful.

*Sincerely,
Diego Buitrago, E.I.T
T. Y. Lin International
Bridge Engineer*

Finally, did you know that NCEES Reference Handbook (Version 9.4) is just published? Next month we will talk about that exciting news and its implications.

I will close with a reminder: In both FE and PE exams timing is everything. To conquer these exams SPEED is crucial, and speed can only be attained through practice and more practice ([try out this month's problems!](#))

Until next time,
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