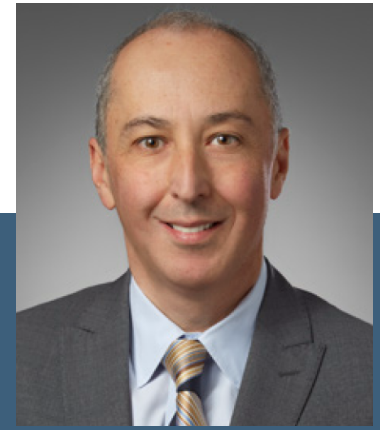


# THE FRUITFUL BRANCHES OF YOUR CAREER TREE

Navigating Your Career Path in the  
AEC Industry



DR. LUIS A. PORRELLO



VLADIMIR KANEVSKIY

## meet LUIS AND VLADIMIR

Congratulations! You have just graduated from university with a degree in engineering and landed your first entry-level engineering job. You are excited and the future looks bright. Fast forward 5 years--you have mastered the technical skills required to do the job and attained your PE license. You start to wonder what the right career path is for you and how to plan for it. Is it to keep advancing your technical skills and become a technical manager? Are you interested in becoming a project manager? How about business development, marketing, or operations? We took the time to interview WSP USA's Luis Porrello, Senior Vice President and Vladimir Kanevskiy, Engineering Manager, to discuss the different routes they chose in their successful careers and asked for advice on how one can navigate their careers as an emerging professional.

**Dr. Luis A. Porrello**, a civil engineer by training, has successfully executed roles of increasing responsibility through over 20 years of experience in the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction industry. He has benefited from opportunities to lead teams focused on areas within multiple career tracts in the companies he has served, from technical and project management to operations and sales management. For the last decade Luis has chosen to focus on business development, marketing, and sales roles. He is passionate about this type of work because he believes this area of the business lends itself to significant opportunities to coach, mentor, and teach, which matches his life-long passion for and commitment to learning. For the next decade Luis wants to continuously increase the impact of his ability to grow the capacity of organizations to build top line success, with his intention along the way to continue growing personally and professionally. Luis' technical career as a consultant evolved from entry-level engineering computations and design to task management and program management. Through his project assignments he provided technical direction to the traffic analysis, transportation planning, and intelligent transportation systems components of the nation's largest transportation infrastructure programs.

**Vladimir Kanevskiy** graduated from The Institute of Railway Engineering in Ukraine (former USSR) in 1987. Prior to his arrival to the US, Vladimir worked for 3 years as a design engineer on various railway projects. His professional experience in the US began with numerous highway widening and interchange projects in San Diego, Orange and Ventura counties, progressing to rail transit and P3 toll road projects. While working on various highway projects was an outstanding learning experience, he remained passionate about the modernization of railways. Since 2008, Vladimir has been supporting the program management of the California High-Speed Rail project where he had the opportunity to work closely with State and Federal agencies in his role as regulatory approval manager. Vladimir's recent engineering manager role for the Mid-Coast Transit Project in San Diego is personally important to him as it continues to change the community he lives in. Vladimir has managed final design, served as deputy construction manager, provided design-build oversight, and managed design support during construction of major transportation projects throughout California.

## THANK YOU

TO WSP USA FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT TO  
THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR  
YOUNGER MEMBERS.

TO OUR PARTNERS, LUIS AND VLADIMIR.

TO OUR CO-AUTHORS: OMAR ABU ZEINEH, CHRIS  
KOURY, ALEXANDER SANDOVAL, AND JOHN HONG

## GET INVOLVED

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# *navigating* YOUR CAREER

Think of your civil engineering career like a tree--there's the roots, the trunk, and the numerous branches extending outwards. The roots are your foundation, i.e. your education. The trunk is your brand which you come to develop as you progress in your career (see the last YMF SD article for more on [\*Building an Industry Reputation\*](#)). Once you have developed your brand, you are in a position to branch out; with each branch representing a different type of career path. **You are not limited to one branch and can hop from one branch to another as you figure out what you like, where you excel, and in which roles you want to fill.** These branches include technical management, project and program management, business development, business operations, marketing, and human resources. All of these branches are attainable for **every single engineer** initiating their civil engineering career.



*mentorship*

After developing your brand, the next step would be to **find your mentor(s)**. Receive guidance, ask questions and pick their brain about what interests you about their career path to see if that inspires you. Finding a mentor is a critical step in everyone's career. Successful people have multiple mentors each serving a particular purpose. One mentor could be an excellent person to talk to for technical expertise; the other could be great to learn more about project management or organizational management. Conversations with mentors will contribute to successful meetings with your supervisors because you will be creating the paths you want to branch out towards with your supervisor guiding you along the way. These continual meetings do not have to be formal or be part of your company's performance review.

While exploring career paths, a good place to start is to **learn about the experiences of others that have already established themselves professionally**. This comes back to how crucial it is to seek mentorships from an early stage. Ask them about the aspects of their roles they enjoy the most, what they find the most challenging, and what their day to day looks like. Ask for input on what they deem the most beneficial skills in developing strengths and overcoming challenges. Aside from seeking mentorships, it is equally important to seek and create opportunities.



*curiosity*



*opportunities*

When starting a career it is important to **pursue as many opportunities that will result into tangible work products and assignments**. Instead of gaining recognition through self-promotion, try to build a reputation for yourself from the projects you work on and gain valuable experience. **Ask for opportunities** to attend meetings with clients, agencies, contractors, and joint venture partners to analyze the discussions that go on and to ask questions. Attending these meetings helps develop interpersonal communication skills and widens your ability to understand other engineering disciplines. Gaining exposure to several aspects of the industry will not only help you gain knowledge, but this will help you figure out the direction you want to go in. These avenues can be going down specific design paths and specialization into technical topics such as geotechnical, structural, construction, planning or program management.

Along with seeking opportunities, it is important to also **be flexible and accept risks**. Opportunities will arise to take on roles or work on specific projects that require risks such as switching firms or relocating cities but they will all add to your trunk while also extending your reach to further branches. Say you decide to leave design and try out program management; it may seem daunting to take on a role that does not require you to use the tools you have relied on over the years, but pivoting is critical to your professional growth. Even if the change appears to not be beneficial to the specific branch you were extending out, learning that there are **no perfect steps to take** and **everything is a learning opportunity** is most important.



*flexibility*







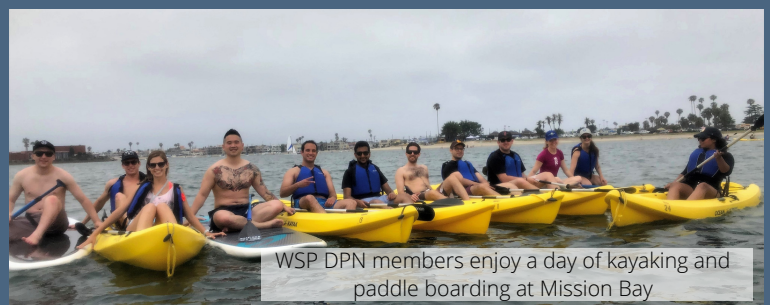
CALIFORNIA HIGH SPEED RAIL

## branch OUT

It is important to remember there is not one career path for you and **there is not a defined path for success in the industry.** Your career path is fluid and it more likely resembles a meandering mountain road with bridges and tunnels. **Take risks and never say no to opportunity;** even if it seems like you are jumping to a different branch or if the responsibilities seem overwhelming. Humans have a tendency to catastrophize obstacles in life rather than learning how to minimize stress and make calm, confident decisions. Personal growth comes from taking risks and taking opportunities outside your comfort zone. **Find your passion, be thirsty for knowledge, hone your skill set, have confidence in yourself,** and as Luis would say, **"Chill out! More responsibility does not have to mean more anxiety."**



YMF touring the construction of Mid-Coast Trolley, a project which WSP served as the prime consultant



WSP DPN members enjoy a day of kayaking and paddle boarding at Mission Bay



DPN members at WSP's annual LAUNCH conference in Las Vegas, NV