



## Are your clients your friends?

A wise partner of a geotechnical engineering firm (Jerry Neyer) once told me, “make your clients your friends.” I wasn’t quite sure what to do with that nugget when he shared it, but I kept it in the memory bank to consider as I continued along in my career.

Over the past 10 years, I have figured out some of what he meant (I think). Partly I believe he was referring to how you treat your clients. Just as you treat your friends with respect, honesty, and genuine interest, so too should you treat your clients. Hopefully, we don’t only call our friends when we want something, and we shouldn’t do that with our clients either. (Do you only call your clients when you are looking for a project?)

We truly care about our friends; we know about their personal lives, their professional lives and their unique interests. We should care about our clients the same way. There are some people in this world that we would never be friends with – we don’t align with their values, their opinions, or their way of handling their relationships. I would venture to say that we should not align ourselves with these people as our clients as well. It just won’t work.

The other thing that I think Jerry was referring to was commitment. Friendship is a commitment to another person - a commitment to a long term relationship. In any long term relationship, there will be bumps and there will be celebrations, but the commitment to your investment in the other person continues through these.

So all of this comes together to start to give meaning to the comment, “make your clients your friends.” It defines how you treat them, how you view your relationship with them, and how you handle the ups and the downs of working together. I am sure there is more to this as well; it will probably take me another 10 years to get the rest of it!