

## • NEXT STEP •

*Advice from Young Engineers Moving Forward in Their Careers*

### Discover Your Passion And Let It Guide You

**J**ING LIAO, EIT, A.M.ASCE, has been passionate about water since high school, when she traveled to Malawi as part of a United Nations Millennium Development Goals program that involved taking water-quality samples for a village. She got to know the villagers and became dedicated to improving lives through better water quality. While attending Mississippi State University, she became active in Engineers Without Borders (EWB), holding several leadership roles and eventually leading the Southeast Region as it sought to meet basic human needs in communities around the world. Liao is a strong believer in engineers discovering their true motivation for what they do—their “why”—and using that passion to guide their careers.

#### What are the responsibilities that come with this new job?

At Clearwater, I focused on regulatory compliance. I carefully followed regulatory activity, understood clients’ needs and unique circumstances, and worked with regulatory agencies to attain the necessary permits. At Black & Veatch, I’ve been doing more design work, and I get to work on many types of projects, which is something I was looking for.

I’m learning how to read drawings, helping with process selection to determine how to most effectively treat water, and working with clients on asset management projects. I am also learning business development through proposal work. It’s neat to see different pieces of the system and learn how everything works together synergistically.

#### What are the chief skills that you developed in your previous roles that help you in this position?

At Clearwater, I developed strong problem-solving and interpersonal skills to work with various personalities and communication styles. I learned to understand clients’ goals and concerns.

In my current role, I more directly serve internal clients, and I can use the same skill set to understand the deliverables.

Being involved with professional organizations further developed my “soft skills.” It’s easy to get caught up in the technical details, when in truth, the soft skills can some-

times make or break a project. In college, I was part of an ASCE concrete canoe team, and from that I learned communication and teamwork.

When I became the president of the Southeast Region for EWB, we built the region from scratch from five to fifteen individuals. After learning from failures, I learned to lead by communicating [our purpose] and empowering the team to figure out how [to achieve it].

#### What personal traits or characteristics helped you win this new position?

I am passionate and determined. I became passionate about solving the water crisis through my experience in Malawi. Outside of collecting data, we would spend time with the people in the village to learn about their stories. Kids followed me around, and I taught them how to use the equipment. Ever since developing those relationships and conducting the tests, I have wanted to be part of the solution—to provide the clean water we can’t live without.

#### What made this position the right fit for you?

I was very strategic in the process of finding a new job. I wanted to work for a company that shared my vision of helping solve the global water crisis. I also wanted to work for a company that values its employees and focuses on developing its biggest asset: its people.

I had a lot of conversations to understand various companies’ cultures and gauged employees’ experiences. During my interview with Black & Veatch, I communicated how I could help the team through my passion, motivation, and collaboration. At the same time, I asked a lot

of questions about the Los Angeles office’s culture and the team dynamics. I see the position as a transformational relationship in which I can grow and help the team and the company to serve our communities and make a difference in the world.

#### What role did mentors, advisers, or your network play in your achievement?

There are many people who contributed to my journey. I am very grateful to them, and I look for ways to pass the kindness forward. With any job-transitioning process, there are a lot of gray areas to navigate, and they provided directional insights and encouragement—to keep me following my ‘why’ when it was hard.



**Jing Liao, EIT, A.M.ASCE**

#### COMPANY

*Black & Veatch (Los Angeles office)*

#### NEW TITLE

*Water Engineer*

#### PREVIOUS TITLE

*Project Engineer 1  
(Clearwater Consultants Inc.,  
Starkville, Mississippi)*

In terms of my new job, one mentor was especially helpful. He encouraged me to take risks and taught me that if I was interested in a position, I should go for it. If it didn't work out, then I would know it was not meant to be. He also encouraged me to focus on others' needs and on how I can help the team and the company be successful.

### What do you hope to accomplish in this new position?

I hope to provide good work and good service to my internal and external clients. I hope to stay curious to learn about technical design and processes along with further developing my soft skills. I hope to stay motivated to build a world of difference through water.

### What types of positions do you see yourself moving toward over the next few years?

Eventually I'd like to be involved in project management to understand the entire project process, from the initial stages to completion. I'm especially interested in moving tasks forward and developing the individuals on the team. I'm also interested in partnering with our clients to understand their challenges and to develop the right team to provide the best-fit solution.

**I see the position as a transformational relationship in which I can grow and help the team and the company.**

### What advice would you give to other young engineers who would seek positions similar to yours?

First, understand that you have a unique story. Understand your 'why' and pursue that. When you start that journey, you will realize it was never about the destination but the process of learning about yourself, meeting amazing people, and perhaps traveling to cool places. You will also empower others around you to do the same.

I would also encourage involvement in company, professional, or volunteer organizations. You will find people who share the same 'why,' and together, you can learn and help each other grow.

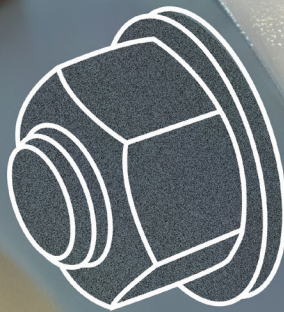
Lastly, I see a lot of people paralyzed by wanting to make the perfect career or job decision. I would encourage them to make the best decision they can at the moment and then make that decision the best it can be.

Don't get paralyzed by fear. Take the next step.

—LAURIE A. SHUSTER

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