

The Doctor Was In and He Took Professional Development to a New Level



Dr. Joshua Schank (Metro's Chief Innovation Officer), Photos © John Livzey, 2016

Innovation is like the weather—much talked about, but seldom acted upon. Metro's chief innovation officer, Dr. Joshua Schank, is changing that paradigm. Heading up Metro's new Office of Extraordinary Innovation (OEI), Dr. Schank looks to act on innovation and bring it to a very practical and implementable level. And in a unique members-only professional development program on March 18, WTS-LA welcomed Dr. Joshua Schank to discuss careers and how he intends to innovate the Southland.

"Many times, agencies like to propose solutions, turn to the public, and ask, 'What are your thoughts on this?' Instead, we need to approach the public and ask them what they believe the problems are and work to fix those. So at Metro, we have to take the best practices from around the world and bring them here. Often, places like Metro have been closed off to the most innovative ideas. That needs to change. To accomplish that, the OEI consists of two main components: incubator and implementer. As an incubator, we listen to people's ideas and develop them into something practical. As an implementer, we turn those ideas into real-world results."



Without question, Dr. Schank and the OEI present a fascinating and compelling opportunity for real and profound change in Los Angeles County transportation. WTS-LA wanted to bring that very same perspective to its members' professional development. After CH2M Hill engineer Heather Anderson representing WTS-LA Platinum corporate partner CH2M introduced Dr. Schank, the program delivered just that. In a lively question-and-answer format hosted by Stantec business development manager Eileen Ryder, Dr. Schank entranced WTS-LA members with everything from OEI's *Unsolicited Proposal Policy* to future-proofing transportation. But the focus of the program was professional development. And Dr. Schank brought more than just the promise of transportation innovation to the program at the Biltmore Hotel. He also brought vast knowledge, wisdom, and experience as a seasoned transportation professional to advise WTS-LA members on how they can shape their careers



“Nothing has been more critical to my career than mentors. Hiring happens because you know someone that is willing to vouch for your character. I strongly recommend that everyone have a professional mentor in the workplace, and if you don’t have that, maybe it’s time to look for another place to work.”

He also addressed “soft skills” that are often given short shrift in many professionals’ training.

“The skills of writing and public speaking cannot be understated. In my experience, many people struggle to do either of those things very well. If you can’t communicate, you can’t get your ideas through. I’ve spent a great deal of time working with people in my office on how to give presentations, and I believe in the ultimate importance of communication.



”Professional Development chair and Myers & Sons Construction business development manager Emily Freund created the Dr. Schank program as part of her highly-regarded series of ongoing, members-only professional development programs. Facilitated by Programs co-chair and Berg & Associates client relations manager Jenelle Saunders, the program also welcomed 18 students from the University of Southern California and California State University, Long Beach, to hear Dr. Schank.

Like the weather, it’s easy to talk about innovation. Doing something about it, however, is much harder. The same can be true for careers. In Metro OEI chief innovation officer Dr. Joshua Schank, WTS-LA has found an answer to both. And in their March 18 program, WTS-LA members got to question that answer firsthand, and learn about how to bring innovation to Los Angeles County transportation *and* their careers.