

## EDITOR'S CORNER

### Volunteerism in Professional Societies

Not long ago I completed my seven years of serving on the Annual Programs Committee of American Society for Microbiology and this summer I completed my three-year term as an Executive Committee Member of the Institute of Food Technologists. Both of these positions were highly demanding of time and energy, both in actual meeting sessions in various cities and communication, reading, and evaluating of issues at the home office. These have prompted me to comment on the issue of volunteerism in professional societies.

There is a decline of volunteerism because everyone is busy in all kinds of urgent professional work to keep up with demands in productivity in one's job. "Do more with less" is the current battle cry in offices around the country. So, where does volunteerism come into play in one's profession?

### Why Do Some People Volunteer?

I belong to about 16 professional and honorary societies and at any one time I am active in about 4 or 5 of these societies. Sometimes I wonder why I spend so much time in these activities. The following are my observations.

### Professional Advancement in Knowledge and Contacts

Professional societies and honorary societies were established because groups of people felt that they have common interests to promote similar ideals and goals. Once the group is formed volunteers are needed immediately. Without volunteers the society will not develop. Similarly, without volunteers the society will not exist!! By sharing similar expertise and experiences, advancement in knowledge will be fostered. Many societies have scholarly publications and newsletters and help keep the members informed on progress in the field. By being active one will gradually make more and more contacts in the profession which will eventually help one's personal growth. It seems to me that being a volunteer in your favorite organization is an *obligation* to help the organization to survive and prosper.

### Leadership Training and Experiences

People have different abilities to lead. Some are born leaders. Others are born followers. In every organization you will find some people just shine as leaders. For many people learning to be a leader in a professional society can lead to skill improvement on the job as well. I firmly believe that the experience I gained in professional societies makes me a better professor in dealing with university committee meetings, debates, and program planning and execution. Observations

on how effective leaders operate will improve ones own performance on the job.

### **Networking**

What better place than a professional society to network with ones peers? One can obtain new information, discover job opportunities, cultivate business contacts, make new friends and reacquaint with old ones. National, regional and local meetings provide one with a rich arena to share ones viewpoint and learn from other's wisdom in the profession. Being a volunteer will enhance and enrich one's professional sphere of influence. There is no doubt that networking in professional societies will help advance one's professional status. I helped many students and friends to find good jobs through professional society contacts.

### **Professional Recognitions**

Although winning awards and honors should not be the goal of volunteerism, it does not hurt to be recognized once in awhile. Sometimes even in scholarly competitions, those more active in the society have a better edge than the less active ones because committee members recognize the active volunteers more readily. Of course winning some prestigious awards in professional societies will bring honor to your institution, university, or company which may indirectly help your yearly evaluation by your supervisor.

### **Step Forward To Lead**

Once in awhile in the course of the development of a society someone must step forward to lead. I was involved with a lukewarm section of a society some years ago. The group was going downhill rapidly. Even though I was busy I could not help but step forward to lead the group. I actually served as the chair for 3 years and eventually helped the group to become more active. This type of volunteerism is similar to being driven by an invisible force to resurrect a desperate situation!

### **Self Satisfaction**

Perhaps for me, self satisfaction is the greatest reward in volunteerism. I volunteer not for fame and glory but to serve an organization that I believe is providing a meaningful service to a particular discipline. After I have completed a task or a leadership role where I worked hard and was successful I feel very pleased and know that I have helped advance the organization just a little bit further on the long-range goal. I gladly hand over the job to the next generation of volunteers and wish them well and will lend my support at a distance.

In conclusion, I believe if we join a society or an organization we should try to be active and should view volunteerism as an integral part of one's membership.

**Someone Must Volunteer or Nothing Will Be Done**

The problem with me is that I have not learned how to say “No” and as a result I am a perpetual volunteer of more activities than I can remember — maybe I am over-volunteered!! So, if *YOU* volunteer then I won't have to volunteer as much.

Have a great volunteer life!

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