



May 2022 Newsletter

From the President's Perspective:

This is one of the last newsletters I will be authoring under the title of From the President's Perspective. I don't mind at all. It seems like I get to be a Chapter Leader (as ASSP likes to title us these days) during times of tumultuous change. My first tenure in the leadership of the Niagara Frontier Chapter was in the late 1990's to the early 2000's. That was when our society was transitioning from pen (or pencil) and paper; using the US Mail to send out communications to the Digital Era. To give you an idea of what that was like, when I was Treasurer, I created the first spreadsheet financial report so we could email them to the Board (In Lotus 1-2-3 and Excel).

We had much the same issues as today; Members who are along for the ride and will cheer you on from the sidelines, the challenge of how to deliver Member services on a severe budget, and the administrative requirements of ASSE (we were Safety Engineers back then) to meet. At the same time, managing a emergent technology that would be somewhat more mature (and complex!) today; the world of the Internet, Cloud and Digital Presence. We established our first website, had our first digital hack (someone tied our website to a porn site) and our first troll. We also had a few Professional Development Conferences locally. Ah, yes, it was a memorable experience as President!

I guess that experience sort of prepared me for what we experienced over the last 2 years. The COVID pandemic provided a serious challenge in calculating how to deliver quality Member Services. As back then, we have an awesome, world class team here in the committed members of the Niagara Frontier Chapter to advise and assist. The digital management skills of Karen Peissinger and Ryan Knoph have been invaluable; I give them all the credit for facilitating the excellent communications effort we experience. With Tom Marino taking care of finances, I had nothing to be concerned of in that area; just "Tom, do we have enough money to do _____?" He could give me answers. And make sure the bills were paid on time and in full. Carol Schmeidler took care of monitoring the events surrounding the dissolution of ASSP's House of Delegates and keeping us informed of what was going on and facilitating our decisions regarding how NFC would vote. Admittedly, Carol's synopsis of the situation and advice during our discussion on the vote changed my mind on one issue. As back then, I benefited from the counsel of Brett Carruthers on the byzantine politics of ASSP. Brett's advice on how to proceed with dealings of Region VIII have been invaluable in advocating for you, the Members of NFC. The Team once again was the resource that helped the last 2 years achieve some notable successes. It will be good to step back and relax, knowing that Niagara Frontier Chapter will have competent and committed leaders to help guide us in Tom Marino and Tony Buttino (and some future leaders to come after them).

The vote on the Bylaws revision is 100% in favor of the revision. Unfortunately, there were not a lot of votes (13) on this issue. I will be forwarding the revised Bylaws up to the Area and Region for sign-off and transmission to ASSP national. That will give Tom & Tony a clean administrative slate to start off with.

Folks, our Profession is undergoing re-definition, like it or not. We are experiencing a tremendous period of social change that may or may not yield good things for the Safety Profession. I would like to



opine on them. A good part of our Profession is understanding the world defined by physics (gravity, heat, cold, electricity, light, force, etc.), chemistry (flammability, toxicity, etc.), biology (humans are biological organisms), math (numbers, formulas, data); the concepts that define science and engineering that controls technology and process operations. We are rapidly utilizing Technology in the form of Digital Presence in the Internet and Cloud, Artificial Intelligence to help us make decisions, real-time data acquisition and transmission as well as presentation of that information. If you practice Occupational Safety, you also need skills in Psychology and Sociology to understand how to motivate humans to make smart choices in safe work performance and the function of organizations. It also comes in handy when you are analyzing safety critical designs to make the design “human friendly”. Learning the trade, so to speak, especially at the higher levels, is one that challenges your learning skills and can be extremely interesting. It also never ends (until you retire, maybe not even then) and is a constant for those who are at the top of the game.

It used to be easier. We had mentors within our organizations and structure that allowed for progress to the top position. You could learn the trade through formal education and actual practice with experienced professionals overseeing what you did to help you learn the decision making process. Mentors also helped with understanding how the organization worked (politics). No more.

Organizations are “lean”; only the actual number of employees necessary to perform the essential functions of the department are on staff. With Technology, organizations can justify using tech to assist us in performing our tasks (The Tech Gurus who come around marketing their electronic “Safety Management System” that will make our life easier.); we now have data to make decisions with at our fingertips instantly. Also, tech makes us available 24 – 7 on a worldwide basis (going out of cell phone range?); our management teams now can reach us with each and every issue they think we should be involved in. The issue with AI, where’s the human factor? Redundancy? Even if you are isolating due to COVID, you are still available (cell phone and Zoom)! Why should we have a backup person on staff?

We are also letting social trends that may not be durable over the long term influence how we manage safety and risk. Some of these trends can be extremely divisive; we need to encourage collaboration! Collaboration is one of those positive attributes of human nature that I enjoy! I may not have the answer to my problem, you may be able to facilitate that solution; I may have successfully solved your problem sometime in the past and can offer the advice you need to be successful. Let’s stop the practice of looking at numbers of people (in both gender and ethnicity) in positions and focus on helping those of us who practice the profession of Safety (and Risk Management) become the successful people we can be. Let’s be a Mentor; that experienced professional who is willing to listen and facilitate guiding the new practitioner of Safety when they need help! Oddly enough, if we adopt the attitude of collaboration, learning and inquiry; we will become more diverse and inclusive in an evolutionary nature. ASSP at one time (when we were ASSE) seemed to be heading that way, we need to ensure that as a Chapter and Society, we continue in that direction. In order to continue the tradition, we need to pay attention to others working in the Safety (and Risk Management) profession, inviting them to join and contribute.

Hopefully, my last newsletter will be able to focus on a few other areas and potential solutions.