

"Inches make a champion."

—Vince Lombardi, Coach, Green Bay Packers

February 6th marked the closing ceremonies of the United Nations (U.N.) International Year of Light and Light-Based Technologies (IYL). And what a year it was—a year of worldwide events and activities, with a healthy dose of interest, fun and excitement. IYL captured the imagination of countless people inside and outside of our community, and carried an enormous benefit in expanding the number of nontechnical people around the world who can appreciate the essential, enabling nature of light on our daily lives.

In hindsight, this success may seem obvious. However, IYL was anything but an easy activity to launch.

IYL means something much different to me from just a successful celebration. From my perspective, IYL is synonymous with one person, John Dudley. Over the course of several years, John went around the world trying to convince a large number of institutions to support a possible U.N.-endorsed year-long celebration. Many people—perhaps even most—thought John was a good-hearted person who was more or less wasting his time. It seemed somewhat far-fetched that much would be accomplished, even if he could get the initiative off the ground. How wrong those people were.

More often than not, OSA's successful activities have a similar history. An idea emerges, and someone or a small group steps forward to champion an activity—be it a journal, conference, award or celebration. They press forward, even against the many naysayers who can suck the life out of a room, or an idea. Yet a champion—who believes firmly in the idea—will consider the valid reasons why something may not work or may be impractical, and then find ways to overcome those challenges. Champions understand that if something were easy, somebody else would have already done it.

OSA has a rich history of being willing to try new things, to add value to existing activities, and also to do the hardest thing: "sunset" an unsuccessful endeavor. Our volunteers are encouraged to take risks—with the knowledge that doing nothing to improve is a sure sign of decline. With a bit of tongue-in-cheek, Jozef Straus, former CEO of JDS Uniphase, asked one of my students when he visited my lab in 2001, "What does JDS stand for?" My surprised student drew a blank, at which point Jozef winked and said, "Just Do Something."

OSA has maintained its strong core values over its 100-year history. But the entrepreneurial spirit of our volunteer champions has enabled us to evolve what we do and how we do it, all for the benefit of our community and society at large.

What will our activities look like in 10, 20 or 30 years? Who will be our leaders? Four centuries ago, Sir Francis Bacon wrote that "things alter for the worse spontaneously, if they be not altered for the better designedly." Each of us can step forward and champion some part of the good change that will inevitably happen.

John Dudley—and all of the John Dudleys that I know—I salute you!



OSA

“Each of us can step forward and champion some part of the good change that will inevitably happen.”

Respectfully and warmly submitted,

*Alan Willner,
OSA President*