

—President's Message

"[Y]ou share an objective with all other advocates: to have your story move audiences from apathy to empathy to action."

—John Capecci and Timothy Cage,
Living Proof: Telling Your Story to Make a Difference

How has our field changed over the past few decades? Granted, we have made enormous strides in our science and engineering. But do decision-makers, and society at large, really understand how essential our field has become?

When I joined the field about 35 years ago, one could point to specific examples where optics and photonics had already made a commercial impact. But much of the discussion back then was about the field's *potential* to impact society. We had vibrant journals and conferences that mainly enabled us to interact among ourselves. Today, things are different. The journals and conferences are still there, but now many of our advances critically enable robust industries.

Unfortunately, our field's importance still hasn't become cemented in the mindset of society at large. Do people not steeped in optics and photonics understand that the field has now become "too important to fail"—that there remain basic science and engineering problems to be solved, and that society must strategically support optics so that it can continue to produce impactful advances and help enable worldwide economic growth?

Perhaps not. And, as a result, we as a community must help advocate for our field.

OSA has highly active advocacy activities and government-relations committees that try to do exactly that. But the organization's real advocacy powerhouse lies in its 19,300 members, whispering in the ear of people with whom we interact. It is having passion, conviction, dedication and a compelling story. And it is telling that story again and again.

Most of you are familiar with the leadership of OSA and other professional societies in the successful National Photonics Initiative. Here are just a few lessons I have learned through my own involvement:

Our champions need our help. About 10 years ago, Lawrence Goldberg of the U.S. National Science Foundation taught me something wise and invaluable during a casual stroll. Optics has many valiant champions within decision-making organizations around the world. These champions, however, sometimes struggle to effectively communicate to their leadership the potential impact of optics. We can help enormously by bringing influential external people to help make our champions' internal message loud and clear.

Success can take many forms. It is great to advocate for large programs, but such successes are few and take years to come to fruition. We must keep the dialogue going by continually telling the story about how crucial optics is to our present and future well-being. This takes patience and fortitude, and requires cultivating relationships and building trust. Often we must start again and retell the story from scratch.

I implore OSA members to tell that story every day. The small things we do will collectively have a big impact for the future. In today's world of competition for resources, standing still means that we are, in reality, falling behind.



OSA

“ We as a community must help advocate for our field. ”

Respectfully and warmly submitted,

Alan Willner,
OSA President