



President's Column

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It's Good to Have a Baby

"Every noble work is bound to face problems and obstacles. ... One's actions should be good for others, and for oneself as well. Once a positive goal is chosen, you should decide to pursue it all the way to the end. Even if it is not realized, at least there will be no regret." Dalai Lama.

Who Are You?

We've all heard that a compelling idea should be able to be pitched within the short time frame of an elevator ride. Short, sweet and to the point, and then someone "gets it."

Let's take this one step further by answering the question, "What have you accomplished?" If the answer is long-winded, then you have a problem. Your achievements resonate much better when accompanied by just a few compelling specifics. When I mentioned to one of my students that he was sitting next to "Herwig Kogelnik, the inventor of the DFB laser," my student's eyes lit up. I liken a successful person's resume length to an accordion. It starts off short, it grows with time, and then when greatness strikes the resume shrinks again. I imagine that Charles Townes' resume is one line: Received the Nobel Prize in Physics for the Invention of the Laser. This lesson was emphasized to me by Djan Khoe, a LEOS Past President, when we were discussing awards. He said that "a winner needs to have a baby," something specific that a person can be known for in order to be recognized. This is true whether it be technical achievement or service leadership. Tom Giallorenzi? "Oh yeah, wasn't he the first Editor-in-Chief of the IEEE/OSA Journal of Lightwave Technology?"

Scott Hinton, LEOS Past President, has been strongly advocating that volunteers become champions. Pick a valuable idea, be a champion and run with it, and you will always be known for it.

Be a Champion

Woody Allen has said that "90% of life is just showing up." In terms of a person's professional career, I couldn't disagree more. Harvard University's credo is the Latin for, "I came, I saw, I conquered." I know many people who show up at meetings and follow a different credo of, "I came, I listened, I voted, I left." This is a wasted opportunity to accomplish something that is uniquely your contribution. Jozef Straus, co-founder of JDS Uniphase, once told me that JDS stands for "Just Do Something."

Simply mentioning to someone that you want to volunteer might not produce an excited response. It is more effective to describe a specific project that you want to champion or what value you might bring to an existing project. Some issues to consider include:

1. "Inches make a champion." Vince Lombardi, American Football coach. You might need to start small or break up a project into small pieces. Good committee members become Chairs, good Chairs become V.P.s, etc. Moreover, even big projects can be accomplished if each of many small tasks can be individually tackled.
2. USC's President Sample stated that many people want to BE President but few want to DO President. It's nice to have a prestigious position, but you really must enjoy the day-to-day process of the position as well. If you want to be Chair of something, then do a great job and enjoy doing it.
3. It is easy to be a nay-sayer and have cogent arguments as to why something cannot be done.

Try to find the reasons why something can be done. Remember that if it was easy, someone else would have already done it. Bran Ferren of Applied Minds gave a recent Plenary Presentation at OFC at which he stated that there are always “requirements” people (i.e., nay-sayers) who can “suck the life-force out of the room.”

“An idea is worth nothing if it has no champion.” Anon. There needs to be a spark of inspiration, but that spark might not even be your own. There are many excellent ideas that float around in discussions, but few people step forward to champion them. In fact, many of the successful “babys” that I have championed in LEOS were originally someone else’s idea. The JSTQE Special Millennium Issue? Paul Shumate’s idea. Rekindling the JLT Special Issue on OFC? Karen Liu. (And never forget to acknowledge and thank the person who had the original idea.)

Hands-On Approach: Pick a Project, Stay Focused, and Rely on Your Partners

Below are some steps that one might use to be a champion of any given LEOS activity:

1. Pick a Project: An idea should be something you sincerely believe will be beneficial to our community and that you will enjoy extending the needed effort.
2. Build Consensus: A friend told me that he regularly rereads the book, *The Selling Starts When the Customer Says “No”*, by Seelye and Moody. You must build consensus among groups of people that this idea, if successful, would be worthwhile. If you can’t sell the core goal, it will be enormously difficult to implement. Trust key advisors for their insight on laudable ideas, and take avuncular advice as to when it is time to kill an idea and move on to the next great goal.
3. Stay Focused: Divide the tasks into small pieces, and stay focused on the final goal. No matter how busy you are, don’t put the project aside for months in between actions. It’s your “baby,” so you must nurture it.
4. Motivate Partners: You probably will need to build a team. Your partners will be a combination of volunteers and staff. Each is extremely critical, must be treated with respect, and be properly motivated. Delegate tasks, understand that volunteers have “day jobs”, do more yourself than you expect of any partner, and be the first to share credit. Being a champion and having a “baby” can be a very fulfilling part of your career, and, according to Tingye Li, you will also have fun in the process!!

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