



President's Column

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“Staff: Infection or Infectious?”

“Infectious: capable of affecting the emotions and attitudes of others.” Webster’s Dictionary. All LEOS members interact with our wonderful staff people in numerous ways. These individuals are the heart and soul of our society, and they are “infectious.” They can enhance or detract from the value and enjoyment that our members experience. From processing manuscripts efficiently to simply answering the phone in a friendly and helpful manner, they have enormous impact!

LEOS is fond of saying that we are a “member-driven society.” This implies that the ideas for new conferences, new journals, committee members, and invited papers tend to originate with volunteers. Although staff does not try point the Good Ship LEOS in any direction, they are indispensable with realizing any program.

VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF: PARTNERS

“Machiavelli says: every prince needs allies, and the bigger the responsibility, the more allies he needs.” Silvio Berlusconi, Former Prime Minister of Italy

Any LEOS activity is truly a partnership between staff and volunteers. Let’s take conference management as an example. The Conference Technical Chair and the Conference Staff Manager must accomplish numerous tasks. Invitee list and hot topics? Chair. Coordinating meeting rooms and audio/visual? Staff. There are also many issues that are jointly handled. Publicity? Both. Deciding where and when to hold the meeting? Both.

Furthermore, money is not evil, it is simply necessary to keep any organization functioning properly. Both the Chair and the Manager have a fiduciary responsibility for the conference’s financial health. Therefore, the Manager will often raise practical issues that might constrain the Chair’s options. In so doing, the Manager is helping the Chair do a better job.

Who is in charge of the conference? BOTH!! And like any joint venture, the project will fail if the partners do not work well together.

What about journals? In the course of interacting with members, staff develop keen insights about the level of responsibility and collegiality of volunteers. For example, a journal editor-in-chief might want to invite someone to be an associate editor and will ask the staff for their opinion. A staff person might say, “Gee, this person might be a great researcher, but he/she never turns in a review on time, always submits revisions late, and rarely responds to my emails.” Would I want to take a chance and put this person in the critical path of members’ manuscripts? No way!!

Overwhelmingly, staff are dedicated people. They truly want to help and make an impact. If you have an idea, a motivated staff will do whatever it takes to help you achieve your vision.

Additionally, don’t forget the times that you asked a staff person for a special favor that slightly bent a rule, and they helped you only because they cared.

They are critical partners. I have rarely formed a project-oriented committee that doesn’t include staff people, and I have always valued their opinions.

WHAT MOTIVATES STAFF?

“If you treat staff as your equal, they’ll roll their sleeves up to get the job done.” John Ilhan.

It is critical to understand what motivates staff. Although we have many cultural differences, we all want respect, appreciation, care, and efficiency. Some key issues are:

This is their job. They are dedicated to it, want job satisfaction, enjoy a warm interaction, and

want to be evaluated highly. Anything you do to enhance these will be appreciated, and anything you do to detract from these will be despised.

You are just one of thousands of members. If you are a pain, they will try to avoid you.

Staff is providing a service, and all service providers have guidelines to follow. Ignoring deadlines, phone calls and emails simply makes their job harder and is aggravating.

They respond to kindness and don't take well to being bullied. You may win the battle and lose the war.

Volunteers come and go. Therefore, you and your rantings will probably be gone eventually.

Each staff person reports to someone. Any friction with a member affects their job environment, and any criticism of them to their boss can be deadly.

MUTUAL RESPECT AND WARMTH

"Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing." Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Respect: Mutual respect is the glue to any relationship, and members and staff must value each other's importance to the organization. You are in trouble if you catch yourself thinking, "I am a famous engineer, and who does this staff person think he/she is?" It is impossible to build relationships, alliances, and consensus if you don't respect the people you are working with.

People Have a Life: I remember vividly the first committee meeting that I ever attended. Tingye Li saw an OSA staff member (Barbara Hicks) and gave her a big "hello" hug. Like anyone else, staff respond to kindness with kindness and warmth with warmth. Furthermore, our "partners" have families, stresses, and celebrations. It is just plain civil to inquire someone about the health of their sick child before asking about the status of your contributed paper.

Behavior: It is critical to treat staff appropriately and follow some basic practices:

- a. The great sage Hillel said, "Don't treat others as you would not want to be treated." Simple and powerful.
- b. Thank them. Moreover, tell their boss about their good job.
- c. If you have a problem, please work it out with the staff person directly. Don't be evil - please contact that person's boss only as a last resort.
- d. Return phone calls/emails promptly and turn in material on time. (Ouch! This one will haunt me.)

Have I always treated staff correctly? Certainly not. Do I regret each instance? Most definitely!!

NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LEOS' Executive Director and my valued PARTNER, Dr. Paul Shumate, will be retiring this Fall. (More will be written in an upcoming Newsletter issue about Paul and the outstanding job he has done.) LEOS is now looking for a new Executive Director, and the announcement can be found at www.i-leos.org. Please publicize this position to interested and qualified parties.

APPRECIATION

I want to express my deepest appreciation to all the LEOS and non-LEOS staff that I have partnered with over the past 20 years. You have been my mentors and extended family. Your kindness and effectiveness have greatly enhanced my career. Since I cannot name all of you, please know that you are all in my heart!

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