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Reach Out and Teach Someone

by Jack Vivian, Ph.D.

At no time in the history of the ice arena industry has the opportunity been so ideal for knowledgeable professionals to step forward to lead and direct the future of the industry. There is a tremendous need for experienced managers to pass on their skills and competencies to developing managers, to consult on the start up of new facilities, to present at the ISI Annual Conference, and to teach at a school of the Ice Arena Institute of Management. It is time for young and old professionals, companies that supply products and services to the industry, and professional educators to come to the aid of ice arena management in the United States. The educating of a new breed of ice arena professionals is of critical importance and is a project that requires many helpers.

No doubt you know at least one colleague who's been quoted by the press and the public as an "industry spokesperson or expert." This individual gets called for quotes whenever there's big news in the industry and gets articles published in magazines and journals. If you've said to yourself, "I know more about this business than "So-and-So," why aren't you out there making a professional name for yourself? One has to step outside one's comfort zone to gain recognition. Better to show yourself as a competent and helpful professional than as a pundit or a pundit-wannabe. Pundits are easy targets for cynics and opponents.

If you don't feel ready to take on speaking or writing assignments but have a desire to do so in the future and are willing to prepare, there are a number of ways you can assess your talents and skills. Get involved in presenting a topic at the ISI Annual Conference. Each year we listen to presenters, many who are new to the industry and propose to teach this industry how to do things right, only to leave the industry and not be heard from years later. In the meantime, experienced managers sit back afraid or too lazy to take on the uncomfortable role of instructing. Although presenting in a conference or classroom setting is an art, it is something that any manager who knows his or her material can attain.

Professional journals are always looking for knowledgeable individuals who can put their ideas on paper. If you write reasonably well, you could gain valuable exposure by submitting articles to trade journals, newspapers, and even the mainstream press. Having published a newsletter six times per year for nearly six years, this author is very familiar with the need for more writers in our business. I'm sure the editor of the EDGE would agree. If your articles are well received, you may have editors and publishers asking for articles on other areas of your expertise. Those who are published not only leave a lasting impression but are recognized throughout the industry. Teaching through the power of the written word is one of the highest forms of contribution to the profession.

Try expanding your community outreach efforts by offering your expertise to others. Target influential groups in your area by soliciting opportunities to lecture on your facility's operations and programs. Assemble newsworthy information on program participation, economic impact data, and statistics on regional and national aspects of our business to share with audiences. Being an after-dinner speaker sharpens your entertainment skills while mixing a blend of information into the message. Once you present to some organizations, you will become a regular on their annual calendar as they strive to find speakers of interest to their members. Sports, especially hockey and figure skating, are popular and easy to present. Audiences never tire of interesting stories about sports.

Even getting involved in community organizations that have nothing to do with your profession can

be useful. You learn to become a spokesperson for your facility and develop communication and planning skills while becoming acquainted with potential customers or vendors. Furthermore, the arena has excellent opportunities to host campaigns that help fund the missions of local community organizations. This will enhance your business and raise your image in the community.

Best of all is to educate and serve as a mentor for the young employees in your facility. Mentoring is a very challenging and time consuming job; however, the benefits to the facility and profession far outweigh the time commitments. Prepare training materials on ice technology, resurfacer operation, refrigeration, program development, retail and food service, and present this to aspiring young employees. Teach them the business by taking them through your educational plan. Give them checklists and reading assignments to monitor their progress and development. Provide tests or competency demonstration points along the way to help motivate your people.

We've all had at least one moment when we've said," I wish I had some control over the type of people going into this field." In reality, you may be able to exercise more influence than you realize. You have a resource within reach that you may have ignored. Yet, tapping into this resource creates potential long-term relationships that build respect and loyalty—and it won't cost you anything more than some of your time. The time to reach out and teach someone and to strengthen our industry is now. Get involved.