



## **Enhancing Your Career—The Value of ASME**

*(Winning essay of the 2006 Old Guard Early Career Engineer Essay Competition)*

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There are some engineers for whom the value of ASME membership is evident. Some engineers use ASME codes as part of their design requirements. Some consult or work for small firms, and turn to ASME to find benefits. Some chat with suppliers or socialize with bosses at ASME section meetings. I am not one of those some engineers.

The value of my ASME membership is not found in traditional ways. As a structural engineer and group lead for Boeing, supporting modifications to 747-based aircraft, ASME codes are not usually a part of my performance criteria. The new research presented through ASME communities of practice is not often necessary supporting a 40-year-old airframe design. My employer offers comprehensive benefits options, and my chief engineer practices electrical engineering.

As a young engineer just out of college, I found that my local section, the Central Kansas Section, was looking for volunteers to serve on the executive committee. I was elected treasurer, and it was a pleasure to serve. One of our section's emphasis was student relations, and that year we planned a picnic with the Wichita State University student section. Paying for the food, I went grocery shopping with the student section chair, a young woman of quiet integrity named Lisa Reuter. The picnic was a successful mixer, and it was an introduction.

When Lisa joined Boeing following her graduation, she gathered together the dozen young engineers she knew at Boeing into a social circle. Outside work, we scuba dive, snow ski, and often have lunch together. Inside work, thanks to our diverse assignments, we are an information network for managing our assigned tasks and careers. Who will be our new manager? What changes are unofficially anticipated on the next airplane? Do we expect an urgent project request from the customer soon? Our grapevine keeps us better informed and better prepared than formal communication, simplifying our jobs and advancing our careers. The tremendously valuable benefits of friendship and collegial camaraderie are a very unexpected result of my ASME membership.

As I moved up through the positions in my local section, I was exposed to the activities of the regional operating board, and soon I was asked to be our region's membership development representative. The position would provide an education in presentation and motivation. At the spring and fall regional meetings, I presented our membership statistics, solicited feedback from section



leadership, and distributed rewards and prizes in an attempt to boost membership development efforts. I saw little correlation between my efforts membership development metrics, but the forum was an outstanding opportunity to practice my presentation and public speaking skills.

Last year, the presentation skills that I developed through ASME were once again called into service. I was part of a team, including a few managers, reviewing engineering challenges and expectations, and providing guidance to a supplier. Before we left, following my ASME habits, I reviewed the meeting agenda and prepared a presentation covering my topic. When the meeting began, I found I was the only person with prepared remarks. After the meeting, my manager said he and many others were impressed that I covered the important technical information while keeping everyone's attention. That spring, the value of my ASME membership was reflected in my performance evaluation.

While I was regional membership development chair, one of my duties was representing my region on ASME's committee on membership. I met many interesting and admirable people through that experience. More significantly for my career, it was an opportunity to participate in a group decision-making process. Some sessions were efficient and highly productive, while others were less focused. It was fascinating to watch the chair, or occasionally a committee member, guide the flow of discussion and address the business at hand. At work, I am leading a process improvement team. The lessons I learned listening to my wiser ASME colleagues have helped me keep my team's attention directed to our purpose, and have helped prevent the domination of our team by a few members. Through my process improvement team activities, facilitated by my ASME experiences, my career is broadening beyond technical leadership and into process leadership.

After my membership development term ended, I became a regional representative to the ASME nominating committee, which has been one of my most valued ASME experiences. In a daily business context, the skill of evaluating people has helped me select capable members for the small group of engineers that I lead. Thanks to the talent and teamwork of the people working with me, we have weathered challenging programs and are ahead of our peer groups in many areas. The recognition that comes from these activities is beneficial to the careers of everyone in the group, and it can be attributed to the abilities derived from my ASME membership.

In a more general context, the nominating committee is a showcase of role models and positive examples for engineers, both in the candidate pool and the committee. We start life dreaming large, but as time passes those aspirations seem to shrink until we are content with a day of the average. When I am



challenged to rise above the ordinary, I remember the qualities of some of the ASME officer candidates I have heard and met, and draw upon that. When difficult discussions are needed, I think of my committee colleagues who had the courage to address difficult issues and controversial choices with civility and personal grace. The ability to navigate the difficult stretches of my career has been a valuable asset strengthened through my ASME membership.

Recently, many of these skills I developed through ASME were tested. Last December, my friend and mentor Larry Hole, an ASME Fellow and long-time member of the Central Kansas Section executive committee, called me and a few other young engineers together for a meeting. Larry said he would be having a little surgery over the holidays, and may need some help during his recuperation preparing for Boeing's participation in the Engineer For A Day program during Engineer's Week. We reviewed the plans and offered our support. As we left, Larry asked me if I would lead the team if he was not back. I replied that it would be no problem. At the end of the winter holiday, Larry Hole died from complications resulting from the surgery.

With his plan, I reconvened our group. We added members to our team, assigned tasks, and reported progress. For the 15 students who spent a day at Boeing IDS-Wichita, we arranged security, hospitality, meetings, transportation, a tour, and most importantly one-on-one time to observe an engineer at work. There were challenges, and since Engineer's Week is very important to Boeing executives, our team received attention from high levels of management. After the event, we received positive feedback, and the thanks of our superiors. This career opportunity and the day's success are a result of my ASME membership.

Why do I continue to be a member of ASME? Of course for the value it provides; after all, mine is the consumer generation. That value comes from many sources. Some are traditional ASME membership benefits, such as local professional development training, and a very good credit card. However, the most valuable benefits of my ASME membership are not the ones that typically come to mind, and they are not the ones that come from a specific community within ASME. My ASME membership has helped me develop skills that qualify me for career positions that I enjoy and find rewarding. My ASME membership has helped me develop skills that serve me well when coping with adversity, and it has given me keys to open doors to future opportunities. Most importantly, my ASME membership has brought me together with mentors and fast friends, enriching my life beyond the working day. These golden opportunities that appear unexpectedly are where I find the greatest value in my continued membership in ASME.