



President's Column

Alan E. Willner



"Win, Paul, Win!!"

"You can stand tall without standing on someone. You can be a victor without having victims."
Harriet Woods, American politician and activist.

Appreciation

Our exceptional LEOS Executive Director (ED), Dr. Paul Shumate, will be retiring as of Fall 2006 after having led the LEOS Staff since 1999. Paul put his own unique stamp on LEOS, and he has been of extreme value to our community. Paul will be a tough act to follow, and not just because of his ubiquitous green jacket, Powerpoint slides, and jalapeno peppers.

Paul has had a very distinguished career. He is internationally recognized as a technical leader in many fields, most notably being pre-eminent in Fiber-to-the-X. Paul held prominent positions at AT&T Bell Laboratories and Bellcore before joining the IEEE Staff. Prior to 1999, Paul's volunteer service to LEOS was second-to-none, for which he received the 1995 LEOS Distinguished Service Award. Among his other activities, he was the VP of Publications, founding Editor-in-Chief of IEEE Photonics Technology Letters (PTL), Editor-in-Chief of the IEEE Journal of Selected Topics in Quantum Electronics, and General Co-Chair of the Conference on Optical Fiber Communications. As LEOS Executive Director, he has truly been one of us, a kindred spirit who completely understands our culture.

One of Paul's biggest challenges has been managing LEOS' budget. Our field was at the epicenter of the recent technology bubble-and-bust, and LEOS went from being flush with money to having negative budgets. Yet Paul assured the IEEE Finance Committee that he would put LEOS back in the black by 2007. Amazingly, he accomplished this feat two years earlier than he had predicted, achieving a positive actual finance sheet for 2005. He watched our money as if it was his own, shaving a few thousand dollars here-and-there in such a way so as not to reduce any critical member benefits.

I consider Paul a friend and a partner, and I will always deeply respect and admire him. Personally, Paul has been a mentor to me since 1989 when I first asked his advice in his capacity as PTL Editor-in-Chief, and he has always pointed me in the right direction ever since. Frankly, I wonder whether I would have been LEOS President if not for Paul's wise counsel over the years, and I owe him a great debt of gratitude.

Below, I want to highlight some of Paul's wonderful characteristics from which we can all learn.

Attitude is Everything

"The real winners in life are the people who look at every situation with an expectation that they can make it work or make it better." Barbara Pletcher, author.

I am endlessly impressed by the sincerity and integrity that Paul brings to every activity. He always wants the greater good and is extremely intellectually honest. He is continually helpful and of wonderful good cheer, greeting everyone with a friendly smile. Moreover, he has a "kid-in-a-candy-store" mentality about anything new, and he infects others with this curiosity.

Importantly, I have never sensed that Paul's opinions are based on his own personal agenda, but rather on what is best for our community. This selfless approach makes it easy for Paul to build consensus. Moreover, Paul's actions speak louder than his words. He is a do-er, ranging from a strategic vision to the most mundane details about spreadsheets.

Isn't this the kind of person that motivates others and is someone you want on your team? For all of us, Paul is a great role model.

Winning as a Goal

"It takes but one positive thought when given a chance to survive and thrive to overpower an entire army of negative thoughts," Robert H. Schuller

We've all been in meetings in which people offer several reasons as to why something cannot be done. These people suck the creative life-force out of the room. Given that people are naturally risk averse, a few well-placed negative comments are all that is necessary to kill a proposed activity.

It takes much courage, intelligence, perseverance, and vision to champion an activity. If you believe in your idea, you must be its advocate and overcome the naysayers. On numerous occasions and despite initial resistance, I have seen Paul take the initiative, stick with it, and produce a golden outcome.

SWOT Analyses: "Opportunities" Always Come Before "Threats"

"Winning isn't everything...it's the only thing." Vincent van Gogh.

I am going to tweak the common understanding of this well-known quote, and it is probably the most important of Paul's legacies.

Ubiquitous SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analyses deal with potential "opportunities" before identifying "threats." To Paul, new ideas are always opportunities, and he rarely sees a new scenario as a threat. He is the master of naturally finding a win-win scenario so that our members can benefit. "Winning is ... the only thing" to Paul since, I believe, he simply doesn't feel threatened by any small possibility of a downside. Perhaps the best example of this attitude is the manner in which Paul interacts with our key sister societies (e.g., IEEE ComSoc, OSA, and SPIE). I can attest to the fact that their leaders hold Paul in great esteem for his openness, fairness, insight, and integrity. They trust him since he is always looking for the win-win approach. I can't remember an instance when he felt that something beneficial for a sister society could be detrimental to LEOS. This approach also applies to our individual members, for whom he never felt that dual loyalty to more than one society was harmful, but just the opposite – it strengthens our collective perspective.

Paul, Lots of Good Luck!

We all wish you and Randi much happiness and health in your retirement. I cannot thank you enough for all that you have done for me and for LEOS. It has been a genuine pleasure and privilege.

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