



President's Column

Alan e. Willner

The Benefits of Volunteering

"If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else."

Booker T. Washington

Prologue

I have been a volunteer for LEOS for 15 years, and it has always been a pleasure to be involved. I am continually impressed by the selfless and sincere dedication of the volunteers and staff, all working for the betterment of our members.

When Milton Chang called me to graciously ask if I would be interested in being considered for LEOS President, I didn't have to think about it. My enthusiasm for volunteer activities has only grown over the years, and such a position would be a wonderful opportunity to contribute to the entire society in another meaningful way. Frankly, I am thrilled to have this chance to help for the next two years.

Overarching Mission

As President, I believe that I have a mission statement: To help make LEOS valuable to its members. My President's Columns will address in greater detail the specific goals that will help me to achieve this mission, such as: strategic and tactical initiatives worldwide, championing a cause/activity, LEOS involvement in a web-based society, and representation in governance. Of course, I can only achieve my mission with the help of our members, and I look forward to working with as many of you as possible. Please feel free to contact me, and I welcome all suggestions!!

Volunteering

The topic of my first column was easy to pick, since it is the one dearest to my heart. Many people discuss the benefits of membership (as I will), but I wanted to begin by discussing the benefits of volunteering. My volunteer activities have greatly enhanced my professional satisfaction. Of course there are many altruistic reasons to volunteer, but I will focus on the "selfish" professional benefits, many of which apply to younger members even more than older members.

- a. "If the world seems cold to you, kindle fires to warm it." Lucy Larcom
I think LEOS volunteers generally feel that there is a very friendly and supportive environment that enhances their professional enjoyment and satisfaction. We all end up developing professional friendships that can last a lifetime, making any conference or meeting more enjoyable.
- b. When you help others, those people are generally more positively disposed to helping you in the future. LEOS volunteer activities give you numerous ways of giving to others. Moreover, there are few methods of marketing oneself professionally better than volunteering for LEOS. Almost every volunteer activity is publicized with that person's name on it, and you instantly become associated

with a high-quality activity.

c. "A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow-men; and along those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects." Herman Melville

Melville was not describing optical fiber networks, but he was describing the concept of professional "networking." Interacting in a very friendly and non-confrontational atmosphere builds the number of people who know you and, by extension, your work. We are all just people and not machines, and we often make decisions partially based on our personal interactions. Chances are you will be chatting in meetings with future members of the National Academy of Engineering, VPs of Engineering, and Engineering Deans.

d. LEOS has a wonderful partnership between staff and volunteers. If there is some activity or change you wish to champion, all you need to do is step forward, volunteer your time, help develop a plan, and watch how a new initiative can be built. People are amazed that the "baby" they started with a simple phone call or email can benefit their technical areas (i.e., a new Topical Meeting, Journal Special Issue), and this translates into a great "publicity" benefit for you and your technical community.

e. Volunteering very often involves chairing meetings, organizing activities, team building, and/or persuading people to help. This translates into invaluable experience in the development of management and leadership skills that will be useful throughout a person's career. LEOS volunteering is a relatively painless way of learning which techniques are successful and which ones are not.

Heartfelt Appreciation

I have spent the last two years being mentored by Scott Hinton, LEOS Past President, and I could not have asked for a better experience. Moreover, Paul Shumate, LEOS Executive Director, has always given me encouragement and extremely constructive suggestions. Although I will forget many people, there are a few individuals that I must give a heartfelt thanks, for these are the people that have critically shaped the way I will approach being LEOS President: Rod Alferness, Phil Anthony, Fil Bartoli, Neal Bergano, Connie Chang-Hasnain, Naomi Chavez, Andy Chraplyvy, Jim Coleman, Gordon Day, Mike Duncan, Joe Eberly, Gary Eden, Woody Ediger, Steve Fantone, Marty Fejer, Cindy Gady, Tom Giallorenzi, Matt Goodman, Bernie Gollomp, Doug Hargis, Tony Heinz, Susan Houde-Walter, Kristin Howlett, Anthony Johnson, Bob Jopson, Peter Kaiser, Ivan Kaminow, Don Keck, Djan Khoe, Tom Koch, Peter Knight, Ed Labuda, John Lee, T.P. Lee, Fred Leonberger, TingyE Li, Rich Linke, Karen Liu, Linda Matarazzo, Lenore McMackin, Kristin Mirabel, Max Nikias, Prof. Richard Osgood, Jr., Samantha Padilla, Sandy Sawchuk, Liz Rogan, Rich Wagner, Gail Walters, Dick Williamson, and Kerry Vahala. I must emphasize that I have probably learned even more from my loving wife and family and my wonderful students, whose patience and advice have been critical. (Of course, my sincerest apologies to those important people that I forgot to mention!)

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