Lessons in the Value of Effective Communication
Mae Culumber. Fellow Class I

The ASHS Leadership program provides a curriculum that encourages its participants to develop skills to become effective, influential representatives of the ASHS organization, and leaders in our horticultural work, professional societies, and communities. This year’s sessions have emphasized the primary step in becoming a better leader is to take time for self-reflection. Understanding our strengths and weaknesses with respect to the way we communicate is an important development towards improving our role as leaders.

The ASHS Leadership Class I met in late January 2022 for an interactive training aimed at improving professional communication skills. Despite our best intentions, tensions will occasionally develop in our work environments. An individual’s reactive tendencies and communication style during stressful situations can exacerbate disagreements and damage relationships. Successful conflict resolution requires engaging in respectful dialogue to achieve an understanding of separate and mutual interests and to negotiate solutions that acknowledge both parties’ concerns. Respectful conversation is possible amid the tensions of a disagreement when we have the sincere desire to understand someone else’s point of view. The ASHS leadership class has been working over the last few sessions to self-reflect on our individual strengths and weaknesses when it comes to responding to stress and communicating with others. By identifying our own limitations, we can work to improve our ability to communicate effectively and establish mutual purpose leading towards successful conflict resolution.

For several months, the ASHS class has been preparing for a “Day on the Hill”, an opportunity to engage with legislators to communicate the importance of publicly funded programs that support scientific research, education, and community engagement in the horticultural sciences. Uncertainty about the direction of the COVID pandemic led to the cancelation of this year’s visit. Despite this setback, the ASHS Class I has engaged in numerous training opportunities to learn the structure of legislator member offices and committees, to set agenda goals for meeting with representatives, and to effectively communicate our objectives. This training has provided fellows with an opportunity to learn how to refine our message into a short comprehensible synopsis, explaining what our leadership role is within our respective organizations, what we are advocating for, and why this is an issue of concern for the legislator and their constituents on district, state, and national levels. These training experiences will undoubtably be important for the leadership class fellows to prepare for future visits with ASHS and on behalf of our own professional organizations.