Growing FSAWWA’s Future Leadership

Amazingly, by the time this article gets published, we will be finished with the Florida Water Resource Conference, all of the region’s taste contests, Tallahassee Legislative Day, our annual Business Practices and Leadership Workshop, the 2013 Water Matters Fly-In, and the Regional Meeting of Section Officers (RMSO) for Region II AWWA. Think of what your calendar might look like if it included all of this activity in four short months.

Looking at this from another perspective, imagine what the future leaders of FSAWWA, or any volunteer organization, would think when looking at what the leadership does for an organization. It may be that the amount of time spent at functions or events is not nearly as important as how the time was spent.

I would like to focus discussion on that last thought for two events: the annual Business Practices and Leadership Workshop and the RMSO for Region II.

Annual Business Practices and Leadership Workshop

This event, held on March 14 at section headquarters in the City of St. Cloud, was created to better inform our active volunteers, such as region and council chairs, committee chairs, etc., of the business side of our section activities. As the years have passed, the content of this workshop and the demographics of the attendees have changed. Last year we incorporated strategic planning as part of the agenda and we had plenty of new volunteers. This year, we opted to include a team building and leadership exercise, and again we had many new volunteers, who will hopefully be our future leaders.

The morning team building exercise was conducted by trainer Michael Simmonds. There were several components to the exercise, but two lessons stood out for me and I would like to share them, one at a time.

The first lesson is that we ought to listen instead of assuming what we hear. All too often we complete thoughts or ideas with what we want or envision, instead of listening to what the person is actually telling us. As Florida’s water professionals and leaders in our industry, it is vitally important that we are able to listen to what is being discussed before we can properly communicate a vision or solution. To put it another

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way, if leadership is not listening to its membership, how can membership be invested in a vision that is not being properly communicated?

The second lesson, and to me the one that is more important, is that great organizations are full of potential leaders. There is a dichotomy in that statement as these same people have to be both leaders and followers at different times—maybe even in the same day. Successful leaders know and understand when to be followers and when to lead.

As an example, in the exercise we were given we needed to complete a specific task within a very specific time period. For the planning stage we were given one hour, and to complete the task we were given 60 seconds. (For the record, our team successfully completed the exercise.) What we found out in our ensuing discussion with Mr. Simmonds is that the successful teams were able to put personal agendas aside and collaborate to achieve the goal, (i.e., leaders being followers) and then knowing when to lead. Unsuccessful teams were never able to communicate a goal, or they would get stuck on logistics (i.e., too many leaders and not enough followers).

Knowing that our new volunteers experienced these lessons firsthand reaffirmed my belief that our organization is going to be in safe hands for many years to come. The FSAWWA is dedicated to growing our future leaders in the industry, as these lessons can be applied to any facet of their careers, not just within our organization. A special thank you goes to Kim Kunihiro, Peggy Guingona, Donna Metherall, Casey Cumiskey, and Jenny Arguello for preparing this year’s workshop.

Regional Meeting of Section Officers, Region II

On March 22 and 23, FSAWWA leadership attended the RMSO for Region II. This event brings together the nine different sections located within the region:

- Alabama/Mississippi
- Florida
- Georgia
- Kentucky/Tennessee
- North Carolina
- Puerto Rico
- South Carolina
- Virginia
- West Virginia

Christopher McGuiness, AWWA senior section relationship manager for Region II, presented to the attendees a very thorough look at the most recent membership survey that the Association conducted, and focused on Florida-specific data for us to digest. We had actually stolen some of Chris’s thunder as he had already presented this information at the Annual Business Practices and Leadership Workshop the week prior. Another benefit for the FSAWWA future leaders!

The RMSO is a fantastic opportunity for current leadership to share ideas, success stories, and lessons learned. I have participated in four of these meetings; each one has its own atmosphere, but the most fun part of the meeting is always the time where sections share and communicate what we are doing. I have learned that the Florida Section is very progressive in the benefits and services we offer our membership; however, I have also observed that we have much to learn ourselves, and when we share information and communicate with each other, everyone wins. All leaders must continue to grow so that the lessons learned can be passed on to the next generation of leadership.

In closing, I encourage you to visit the FSAWWA website (www.fsawwa.org) for more information on what activities and upcoming events you might be interested in attending, or for which you would like to volunteer. Two to watch out for: ACE13 in June in Denver and FSAWWA’s strategic planning retreat in September. Also, feel free to contact your region chair or any of the board of governors for information. You never know when one of these events, or the person you contact, might be your launching pad to becoming a future section leader.