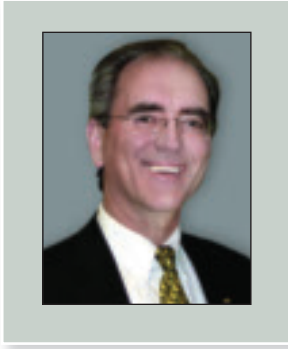


▶ MANAGING EDITOR'S DESK



Nelson Fabian, MS

You know the word association game: I say “cat”—you say “dog.” I say “up”—you say “down.” I say “clowns”—you say “politicians” (or something like that!).

What do you say when I say “conference?”

As you think about your answer, I will tell you that most people respond, “education.” (I will also tell you that I have written this column with the intent to get you to respond differently, at least when you hear “NEHA AEC” (Annual Educational Conference).

That education would most frequently be cited would not surprise an association professional. You see, associations have become the number one source for continuing adult education in our country. And while the association community has been expanding the ways we deliver that education (with webinars, podcasts, and even virtual conferencing), the traditional face-to-face conference remains our most prestigious and effective vehicle for accomplishing this task. (By the way, the only other answer that gets mentioned with any frequency is “networking.” Many conference attendees highly value the friendships they both find and nurture within their overall conference experiences.)

So education—and to a lesser extent, networking—seem mainly to capture the idea of what a conference is in the minds of most people.

I will momentarily address the topic of NEHA and conference education but first I want to note that if you’ve followed NEHA for any length of time, surely you have seen that NEHA continues to change and “become.” This fever for constant movement is self-induced and deliberate. The drive to

This Isn’t Your Parents’ AEC!

This new creation is the result of our work to keep up with the revolution in the relationship between learners and their education, training, and social needs

continually keep pace with changes in our business environment is an essential element in our culture and in our way of conducting business. As I am often heard to say, the essence of life is movement. The day you stop moving (and adapting to your environment), you die! You can therefore be sure that NEHA will always be moving and adapting as the world around us continues to change.

In line with this thinking, it is imperative that we stay up on what is happening within the world of education in general and how you learn in particular. Thus we have observed in recent years nothing short of a revolution in how people obtain, transmit, and process information. This revolution has been driven by technology, the emergence of social media, our desire for high-touch experiences in a high-tech world (as I wrote about in my last column), the speed at which information comes at us, and even our desire to be entertained. This revolution has significantly impacted

how we become more educated and even how we get trained to do what we need to do.

If associations are to remain the primary source for professional continuing education, then it is incumbent on us to understand this revolution and to move to be a part of it. Our ways of helping you to “advance” through education and training (which is the core promise we make within our mission statement) must be in line with your ever-evolving expectations.

Expectations are evolving largely because a new dynamic has developed between the conference attendee and the way in which information is obtained within the conference experience. For example, education must be accomplished in shorter time. Training has become at least as important as education, if not more so. Attendees increasingly expect social network platforms to be incorporated into the overall design of a conference. Speakers are expected to teach, train, and entertain and to utilize the Internet and even texting in real time as a part of their presentations. Interestingly, there is no longer any such thing as the prototypical attendee. Instead, people today come to conferences with a multitude of different agendas, needs, and learning styles.

What’s a poor association to do?!

For starters, conference sponsors like NEHA are learning to build our meetings on assumptions that are meaningful in this world as opposed to past worlds and times. These assumptions include the following.

- We have to provide content that has real-world value so that our attendees can justify their investment of time and money to attend. In short, the conference has to offer an ROI.

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- We need to enable attendees to customize their conference experience if we have any hope of them being engaged in the event.
- The conference has to be designed through the eyes and ears of the attendee, not the sponsor (which has been the norm for decades).

So where does all of this leave us when it comes to your association's annual conference, which is arguably the signature service that we offer to you, the NEHA member?

In our quest to keep our conference relevant and in sync with the times, we have been moving to make changes in the basic template of our conference for several years. I have written fairly extensively about these changes. For example, our conference is increasingly "green." We have also developed two ways of educating attendees to be responsive to generational differences in learning styles: the traditional lecture series and the much more interactive learning laboratories. We have incorporated ROI into our key conference tracks. And we have now built a virtual conference product that enables those who can't attend to still have access to much of our conference content (and in real time).

In short, we've been focused on getting the pieces of the AEC & Exhibition right.

When we began planning for our June 2011 AEC & Exhibition in Columbus, our planning team first decided to step back a bit so that we could see better what the conference now looked like as a whole. To put it mildly, we had an awakening! To our amazement (I'm almost embarrassed to admit), we could clearly see that we no longer had either our old AEC & Exhibition or even a "conference" for that matter, at least in the traditional sense. We could see quite clearly that the combined impact of the many modifications that we had been making had produced an exciting mixture of much more than just a palette of education or networking opportunities. One of our staff called it a hybrid of many different functions; another called it a nexus. In both cases, the point was that our AEC & Exhibition had organically evolved into what was now a truly multifaceted event.

Moreover, its richness was such that attendees could pick and choose among the facets that were of most interest to them to ultimately craft a unique and meaningful conference experience that would meet their individual needs.

In much the same way that cell phones have evolved into multipurpose mobiles, our "conference" has become much more than just a conference or a formal educational experience. It is instead an amalgam of a variety of different experiences from which every single attendee can pick and choose as they wish until they have a uniquely personal event that best suits their needs and wishes. This new creation is the result of our work to keep up with the revolution in the relationship between learners and their education, training, and social needs.

As a result, you will see illustrations in our marketing literature this year that depict in multiple colors an array of facets. The point behind these depictions is that you can choose from among these facets the particular ones that are of greatest interest to you to design your own personal and rewarding event.

To give you some ideas about these facets, I would call your attention to the following:

Education, which consists of many of our lecture hall learning sessions as well as visits with exhibitors, e-modules of various sessions (which are available through NEHA's e-learning program), the many spontaneous conversations that one engages in with other attendees, social network discussion forums, and follow-up interactions with speakers and other conference attendees, etc.

Networking, which includes a variety of planned events that connect people, spontaneous meetings that our conference design encourages, social networking communications, preconference discussion groups that set the stage for conference get-togethers, committee meetings, and even learning how to get more involved in NEHA (which leads to additional networks of contacts and friends), etc.

Training, as distinct from education ... this consists of many of the learning laboratories, field trips, demonstrations by exhibitors, training classes on specific items, and to some extent, interactions with others who can explain how certain tasks can be done, etc.

Advancement, which consists of credentialing courses and exams, résumé postings, job interviews, building connections, learning how to market oneself, recognition through awards, networking with advancement in mind, earning CE for one's credential, giving a presentation which increases one's visibility, and even participation in NEHA, which can advance one's career, etc.

Policy involvement, which consists of work in committees and special NEHA cau-

ses, interactions with policy makers, building connections to open up opportunities to become more involved in policy discussions, opportunities to learn about existing policies and even how they can be influenced, discussions with NEHA and environmental health leaders that can lead to better policy understandings and even opportunities to encourage NEHA to take certain positions, etc.

Enjoyment of the destination, which consists of experiencing the destination of the conference, learning more about the area and even seeing certain unique attractions, seeing life from a different point of view and circumstances, and enjoying the foods, cultures, and entertainment of the destination, etc.

Motivation and inspiration, which consists of meeting leaders, special people, and acclaimed subject matter experts, witnessing excellence through the honor of national awards, hallway conversations that trigger great ideas, giving a presentation that is well received, learning about best practices through educational and training sessions, etc.

The virtual experience, which consists of taking in or saving parts of the conference virtually, setting up meaningful social networks, using social networks to facilitate communications between peers, helping to plan meetings throughout the conference, creating easy-to-access records of everything from new contacts to information to presentations, etc.

Of course threaded through all of these facets are considerations of ROI, the experience of a green event, the opportunity to choose your style of learning, and the support system that the NEHA staff and volunteers are there to provide you with.

In sum, the AEC & Exhibition has become much less a conference in the traditional sense of the term and much more a self-directed and self-designed experience that draws from the many facets that NEHA now offers to its event attendees.

In days gone by, conference organizers looked at attendees as a homogeneous group that basically had to be shepherded from the beginning to the end of the conference. We treated attendees as if they all learned in the same way. And we essentially told you where to be and when to be there.

This is not your parents' AEC. We have been *moving* (that word shows up a lot in this column) to create something new and

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NEHA NEWS

Mangold Award Letter to NEHA Members

Dear Colleagues,

When you entered the environmental health field, others were there to “show you the ropes.” Over the years, some of these individuals became your mentors. You may have looked up to them because of their dedication and innovative approaches to solving problems. A special few of these individuals demonstrated how to implement lasting change within environmental health at the national and international levels. They not only “talked the talk,” but also “walked the walk.” In reflecting on these exceptional individuals, you have taken the first step of deciding whom to nominate for the Walter S. Mangold Award, the highest honor bestowed by the National Environmental Health Association. When we recognize this person, we not only honor this individual, but also honor and recognize all of the environmental health professionals who help make our communities healthy and safe.

The Mangold Award Committee wants to ensure that individuals who make lasting contributions to environmental health are considered for NEHA's highest honor. While an individual who performs outstanding service to his or her community is typically recognized by a local award, the Walter S. Mangold Award recognizes an individual's environmental health service to the nation. The nomination in itself is so unique that it is a wonderful tribute to the person to be nominated by his/her peers. The standards for this award are naturally high, but receiving the award is the ultimate recognition from one's peers and NEHA.

If you know of an exceptional environmental health professional who meets the award criteria, please nominate him/her for the distinct honor of being associated with the Walter S. Mangold Award. Please ensure that in the nominating material you include current letters and supporting documents from distinguished individuals that articulate the individual's exceptional accomplishments within environmental health. The committee's decisions are based entirely on the written documentation and not on personal knowledge of the candidates.

To nominate a candidate for the Walter S. Mangold Award, contact your local chapter of the National Environmental Health Association and ask how to carry out this task. In addition, any five NEHA members may nominate a person for the award. You can find out more information on this award by visiting the NEHA Web site, www.neha.org. The deadline for this award is March 15, 2011.

I wish to personally thank each of you for your tireless efforts to make the field of environmental health science a working reality. Your contributions have saved innumerable people from becoming ill or injured and have reduced their chances of untimely deaths.

Sincerely,

Dr. Hank Koren, REHS

Chairperson, Walter S. Mangold Awards Committee


Prof. Emeritus, Indiana State University 

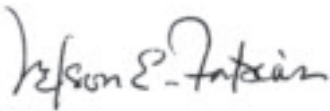
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different and right for the times. We've also created enough of a menu to choose from so that you can now design an experience that is best for you.

We appreciate that we have a multigenerational workforce that is comprised of different learning styles. We understand that one attendee's needs differ from another's. We know that a conference can and should offer much more than just education. We also appreciate as never before the expectation that if you are to give us your time, you have to get something in return that makes your investment worth it.

Check out the “event” in Columbus next June (even if you do it virtually). You won't be disappointed! And if you do, hopefully, the next time that you hear the word “conference,” you'll think “a multifaceted event of your making!” 


Become a NEHA Member!

Why? Because the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) is the only association at the intersection of the environmental and health professions! Nowhere else will you find representatives from all areas of environmental health and protection, including terrorism and all-hazards preparedness, food protection, hazardous waste, onsite wastewater, air and drinking water quality, epidemiology, management, etc. — in both the public and private sectors.

As a NEHA Member You Receive

- **Journal of Environmental Health**
- **Substantial Savings with Member Pricing on**
 - » NEHA's Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition
 - » NEHA Credential renewal and exam fees
 - » E-Learning seminars
 - » Books from NEHA's Online Store
- **And many other opportunities and discounts.**

Visit neha.org/member for additional information
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