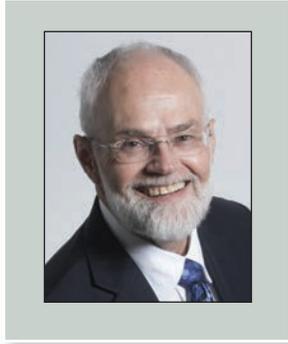


▶ PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Vince Radke, MPH, RS,
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Professional Relationships

As mentioned in my first column, I was born and grew up in Detroit, Michigan, in the late 1940s to 1960s. As a kid there were three things that occupied my time: automobiles, Motown music, and sports (e.g., the Detroit Tigers, Lions, Pistons, and Red Wings). With my father, grandfather, and uncle, I would head down to Olympia Arena on Grand River Avenue to watch the Red Wings play. Besides the hockey games, what I remember most about the Olympia Arena was the smell of stale beer.

At the time, Detroit was synonymous with cars (Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors). My grandfather, who worked at the Ford Rouge Plant, would talk about the production (i.e., assembly) line. There was another production line, however, in Detroit that had nothing to do with cars. Production Line was the nickname of the most famous scoring line in the history of the National Hockey League (NHL), which played for the Detroit Red Wings. When the Production Line stepped out on the ice for a game, they would inevitably score a goal. This forward line consisted of Sid Abel (center), Ted Lindsay (left wing), and Gordie Howe (right wing).

Abel, Lindsay, and Howe were the best of friends on and off the ice. They were colleagues and respected each other. Each member of the Production Line had his own strengths and weaknesses. Abel was older and slower, but knew the opposing team's defense and had the vision to see the play developing as they came up the ice. Lindsay and Howe were younger, faster, and agile, but they were also inpatient. Abel would bring the puck up the ice, size up the position of the defense,

In our professional relationships, are we setting up others to succeed?

and then angle the puck so only Lindsay or Howe could reach it before the defensemen could react. Abel knew that with their speed, Lindsay and Howe would get to the puck and take a shot on goal.

Many years later, a famous hockey player by the name of Wayne Gretzky was asked what made him so great. He said, "I go where the puck is going to be." The Production Line was doing that 30 years earlier. In the 1949–1950 NHL season, Lindsay, Abel, and Howe would finish 1, 2, and 3 in scoring, respectively—a feat that had never been done before and has not been done since.

Other aspects made the Production Line great. The three of them would practice. Of course, they would practice with the rest of the team; however, many times they would stay late and practice between themselves. They would practice to not only improve their individual skills but also their skills and abilities as the Production Line. Abel would say he knew what Lindsay and Howe were going to do before they did it. After practice, the three of them would hang out together over a beer or two. Their families would get together for birthdays and other special occasions. Finally, and this point

is most important, they would constantly study their opponents' strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies. In their time, Abel, Lindsay, and Howe understood that the goalie would not come out from the goal crease and they would take advantage of that fact.

In our environmental health profession, what do professional relationships mean?

Well, I see two words.

When I see "professional," I think knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to solve a problem. Just like the Production Line of the Red Wings, I bring my KSAs to the team to help defeat an environmental health opponent. That opponent could be a pathogen, pollutant, safety hazard, or toxic substance.

When I see "relationships," I think interaction, conduct, trust, respect, and passion with others. You might have other words. The relationships could be with colleagues, partners, local officials, your boss and employees, community leaders, boards of health, those we regulate, and those who regulate us. This construct is very similar to the relationships the Production Line had with colleagues, coaches, management, referees, and fans. Furthermore, each member of the Production Line set the others (and ultimately their team) up for success. In our professional relationships, are we setting up others to succeed? When they succeed, do not we succeed?

I've got another quick example of professional relationships for you to consider. In the mid-1990s, while working at Virginia's Alexandria Health Department, I was asked by my boss to form a task force in Northern Virginia (Arlington County, Fairfax County, and the City of Alexandria) to get the Food

and Drug Administration's (FDA) *Food Code* passed. I got colleagues from the Northern Virginia area health departments, restaurant owners in Alexandria, the local restaurant association in Northern Virginia, and subject matter experts on the *Food Code* from FDA to come together to help pass a version of the code in this jurisdiction. This task was not easy and it took 2 years to complete. What helped the process, however, were my professional relationships with these different partners over the years while I was a member and later president of the National Capital Area Environmental Health Association.

As the task force worked toward completion of its goal, there were differences in some parts of the *Food Code* among the partners that were too difficult to overcome. In the end, we compromised. We agreed on 90% of FDA's *Food Code*. I went before the Alexandria city council with my partners and presented the proposed code. The council had a few questions, but the main question was, "Did all the partners agree to the proposed code?" Our combined answer was, "Yes!" The proposed code was passed unanimously. The story does not, however, end here. A year later, with a little more effort, the remaining 10% of FDA's *Food Code*

was passed. Many of those professional relationships are still in play today.

I wish to leave you with a quote that is often attributed to Harry S. Truman, 33rd President of the United States. As president, Truman said to his staff, "It is amazing what you can accomplish when you do not care who gets the credit." 🐼

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