I professed a year ago in my first President's Message column that becoming NEHA president provided an opportunity to give back to the profession, membership, and association. I said I wanted to help NEHA, and by proxy, the environmental health profession, to “achieve and attain greater success.” “It’s all about giving back,” I mused. Well, I was naive and myopic!

In attempting to fulfill this promise, once again the profession, membership, association, and your board of directors in particular provided me with so much more than I gave. Certainly, my experience this year was greater than I anticipated, and in hindsight, I could never expect the breadth and scope than I anticipated, and most certainly, my experience this year was greater than I gave. This board, this year, has been exceptional!

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In attempting to fulfill this promise, once again the profession, membership, association, and your board of directors in particular provided me with so much more than I gave. Certainly, my experience this year was greater in breadth and scope than I anticipated, and in hindsight, I could never expect to give back as much as I received! In this column, I want to apprise you of how important and valuable a strong board of directors is to the success of the association. As I have stated before, no one gets things done by themselves—it takes others! Others are the team. Allow me to explain as I am relatively assured that many among us have only a conceptual understanding of what an association board of directors does, much less what it takes to succeed and prosper.

As a NEHA board member you are servant to an association that represents a noble profession. Integrated within this service are specific duties required of each board member. Some duties are legally binding and some are conventional expectations as requirements of service. First, legally, a board member is bound by the duty of loyalty. This means a board member must hold the interests of NEHA over personal or professional concerns or conflicts in interest, i.e., board members must at all times exercise good judgment and make sound decisions in the best interests of the association, not of individuals or of specific businesses. Separating this is more difficult than it would appear! Second, a board member must abide by the duty of care. The board member must actively participate in planning, decision making, strategic thinking, and must exercise good judgment. This board, this year, has been exceptional!

Last of the legal duties is that of obedience. It is a board member’s duty to ensure organizational compliance with federal, state, and local laws. In addition, board members must be committed (obedient) to the mission of the association. No hypocrisy allowed. No self-interest allowed.

Subordinate duties of the board include confidentiality; ambassadorship, a duty to disclose conflicts of interest, and a duty to contribute. This duty to contribute includes not only time and expertise but also financial contributions. I am happy to report that this board has met or exceeded expectations in all duties.

Beyond board of director duties are specific responsibilities. NEHA board responsibilities fall into four general categories: 1) governance, which includes mission and vision implementation, long-term planning, and program and services evaluation; 2) oversight, which includes high-level guidance for the executive director (important to this responsibility is ensuring and providing resources in support of the executive director’s work); 3) financial responsibility, in which the board is responsible for monitoring budget expenses and revenues, for ensuring adequate financial resources exist or are developed, and for accounting for association assets; and 4) protecting the reputation of the association. Again, I am happy to report, your board has met or exceeded expectations in all areas of responsibility.

The expertise, commitment, good judgment, connectivity, and reputation of your association have all been elevated. The board’s ability to work with staff, the great operational leaders of the association, and external stakeholders is exemplary.

I tell you this because NEHA had one heck of a year. We’ve grown, we are fiscally robust as never before, we have evolved in capacity and resources, and we have learned. There were bumps along the way but we, as a team, managed a path to continued success. That’s what strong teams with a passion for the mission do.

It has been my honor to serve the membership, the profession, and the association this past year. To you the membership, to the great NEHA team, to Nelson, and to a magnificent board: thank you for the privilege of service. I was naive! I take away so much more from this experience than I could have imagined. It’s more than “all about giving back”; I was naive.

Thank you again! Cheers, y’all!

brianc@plano.gov