



Not the LAST Word...

The older you get, the faster time passes. In many ways it feels like months ago that I attended my first national MRA Conference. But perhaps time really does fly when you are having fun, because some 10+ years of national involvement is now culminating in my final column as MRA President. I'd like to use this time to reflect on perhaps the best questions ever asked of me, as I stepped up my involvement in MRA.

I believe it was Merrill Shugoll who once pulled me aside, and inquired with a mix of incredulity and bemusement, "Why is someone like you so involved in MRA?" She was probably just drawing me out, to test my resolve and commitment. Here are my reasons why. But this is more than a personal introspection. Rather, I hope that every MRA member can read this and understand why MRA is truly a special organization.

Inclusiveness: It was at that same Fort Lauderdale conference that I was welcomed with open arms by leaders of the Association. People like Howard Gershowitz, Sharon Mutter, Michael Mermelstein, Carl Iseman, Joe Ottaviani, Jane Cook and Peter Van Brunt. One of my trusted research partners, Carla Lindemann, had urged me to attend and join the professional development council that I would later chair. As intimidating as it was, surrounded by accomplished professionals and industry leaders, it was hugely satisfying to watch them in action, to learn from them, and most importantly, be accepted as someone who despite my relative inexperience, could offer perspective and energy. That's perhaps the greatest strength of MRA – it allows people to get involved and learn from others. From a research and marketing professional's perspective, it remains the ONLY organization in this space that cuts across ALL facets of the process, replete with client side researchers, data collectors, facility owners, statisticians and full-service firms. At future conferences and meetings, I was welcomed by other future leaders like Ed Sugar, Merrill Dubrow, Colleen Moore Mezler, Elisa Galloway,

David Ashley, Adam Weinstein and Steve Schlesinger, who would become my running mates and confidantes. Together we grew personally and professionally. The names above continue to be important sources of growth and inspiration for me. They have helped me win business and we know that we can always count on each other.

Education: Beyond the enduring relationships, I've actually learned a lot through this organization. Clearly my involvement has helped me to hone my leadership skills. But as one who has attended and spoken at countless conferences across multiple industries, MRA was always a special place, where pretenses were dropped and practical education that you could actually take back and deploy in business were first and foremost. As I've said in past columns, we live today in an "A.D.D./sound byte society," where the esoteric and academically oriented theoretical ramblings of other conferences may ostensibly justify high registration fees. But when you are trying to explain those "learnings" to a sales director, that has desire to comprehend it, the value of that education is lost. MRA education has always done a stellar job of providing compelling and accomplished speakers across multiple disciplines – people who can still "drop the buzz words," but also understand what it takes to get things done. As the only organization that has taken the rigorous steps to offer professional certification, MRA demonstrates a commitment that will serve our industry well in the future.

Forward Thinking: It strikes me that so many professional organizations try to be protectionists and cling to a past that is slowly eroding as our world undergoes such dynamic changes. MRA has never been afraid to embrace the future. Whether it is our advisory board of outside experts that provide the board with a sometimes difficult, but needed reality check, our commitment to measuring the pulse of the profession through business building tools like our Research Industry Index (RII), our leadership in establishing

the first industry-wide auditing system for online data quality or committed looks to areas like research innovation, member career services and small business management tools, MRA does not stand still. Furthermore, we aren't afraid to challenge the status quo and recognize when our focus needs to change with the times.

Aggressiveness: A number of the individuals that I mentioned above were nicknamed "The A-team" as we moved up in the organization. We defined that moniker as shorthand for "Team –Aggressive. But be that as it may, I've always embraced underdogs (Tennessee Titans anyone?), and MRA has funneled that status into a lack of complacency that gives its volunteers the opportunity to embrace change and develop ideas without so much of the bureaucracy of other organizations.

As I step away from the presidency, I will remain insatiable in my desire to make MRA the preeminent organization in our profession. There is still a long way to go. I believe that there is a new breed of potential membership that we have yet to tap into. I've said countless times, that we as a profession need to embrace a more prominent definition of who we are, and what we can be in business. Further, I will not rest until that message is loudly and frequently communicated to as wide an audience as possible. I will continue to write about it as a columnist in future issues of *Alert!*

I thank you all for helping MRA evolve into the great organization that it has become. I urge future boards and every member to never lose sight of that, and continue down a path that while full of twists and turns, can inevitably lead to the greenest pastures, as long as we never take our eyes off the prize.



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