

August 2018

LEADERSHIP LINK

Why Attend a Professional Conference...

“For me, conferences are like little mental vacations: a chance to go visit an interesting place for a couple of days, and come back rested and refreshed with new ideas and perspectives.” — Erin McKean

Sharpen the Saw

Sometimes you have to take a break from the “work” of your work to sharpen your skills. A dull axe won’t cut a tree nearly as effectively as a sharp one.

Don’t be the woodcutter hacking away at the tree with a dull ax while your competition cuts it down in half the time with a sharp one.

Meet Experts and Influencers Face to Face

While not all conferences offer you the opportunity to meet your design idols, your chances are greatly improved when you’re sharing the same space.

Sometimes it’s about taking a selfie with someone who’s influenced you or sharing a business idea with someone you admire, or making a connection that can lead to finding your next mentor.

The Serendipity of the Random Workshop

Some of the best workshops and presentations you’ll experience are the ones you had no idea about before the conference.

Discover that emerging technology that will keep you at the forefront of our profession. You never would have sought out those learning opportunities online... they have to be discovered through the serendipity of a live event.

The Energy of Like-Minded Individuals

There’s nothing like being in a room of like-minded people. Other people who are willing to take time away from the office to learn something new. Other people who want to “better” themselves.

When you sit in a classroom or auditorium, you discover that you’re not alone in wanting to improve your skills and bring something back to your office or organization.

That energy is lacking in all online learning channels, regardless of how much chatter there may be around a hashtag.

Learning In a New Space

Remember that scene in *Dead Poet’s Society* when Robin Williams made his students stand on a desk to get a fresh perspective?

Or consider why so many businesses have meetings off site. It’s because it’s easy to find ourselves in a rut. Sitting in the same chair, in the same office (or cubicle,) or in the same coffee house, can keep us from fresh thinking and new ideas.

Breaking out of the office, sitting in a new space (even if it’s a tired old Holiday Inn conference room), can spark us to new approaches that will grow our businesses.

Invest In Yourself

Perhaps this one is self-evident. Or perhaps we’ve already covered it in whole or in part above. But leaving the office and “sharpening the saw” is investing in yourself.

It’s admitting that you’re worth it. It’s admitting that you still have things to learn. That you can get better.

It’s an investment in yourself, your career, and even your company. When you purchase that conference ticket and when you walk up to the registration desk, you’re saying that you’re investing in your own growth.



American Society of
Landscape Architects

Thank you for reading the Leadership Link. Look for the next issue on Wednesday, October 1st; Leadership Links will be delivered to your email on the first Monday of every-other month.

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Leadership Profile

Q1 Who/what inspired you to become a leader in ASLA?

In 1979, the Annual Meeting was in Atlanta. I was an MLA student at The Ohio State University, and department chair Jot Carpenter was president-elect. Of course all his students wanted to go, and you could not have kept this Georgia native away. The Atlanta meeting was the first time I felt like I was a full participant with (maybe? someday?) something to contribute. And Jot made sure everyone participated! He and others introduced us to so many people. As at many earlier conferences, the talent, critical insights on issues, and inclusiveness of ASLA leaders fascinated me—and we had so much fun. Again, and still, the people made me want to be part of this.

Q2 How do you encourage other ASLA members to lead?

I consider myself to be a nudger rather than a leader. Like my role models, I've tried to get people to connect on issues that are meaningful to them, and as importantly, to understand why an issue is important.

My former students will chuckle (or groan) when I remind them that “so what?” is my favorite question. Not the snippy brush-off, but a penetrating exploration of what something means and what the consequences will be. We think of leaders as having answers and plans. I don't always have an answer, but I can ask intriguing questions that help us find one.

Q3 Who has influenced your leadership style and approach?

My parents demonstrated but never said, “If you are going to be part of something, contribute”. My father, T. G. Williams, was active in ASLA, licensure, and other professional activities, including serving as last president of the Southeastern Chapter and first president of the Georgia Chapter. He began taking me to national and chapter meetings as a tadpole. ASLA members were always gracious and encouraging to the little kid, particularly Georgia's Edith Henderson and Claremont Lee, who were respected leaders in the profession. (See The Cultural Landscape Foundation's latest newsletters for a threat to one of Claremont's Savannah projects.) Additionally, and I never expressed this strongly enough to them, they were tremendous role models in how to approach life. And they weren't “Women in Landscape Architecture”—they were landscape architects. Five year old Kay thought Ian McHarg was the most fascinating, sweetest guy around. I did not realize he was Important 'til I was working on my BLA.



Kay Williams, FASLA

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Leadership Profile



Kay Williams, FASLA

My father and Florida's Herrick Smith achieved a great deal by consensus-building and quiet logic. Leaders can accomplish much through gentle questioning. On the other hand, when you have a force of nature like Jot Carpenter... We need strong public voices, but I could never come close to Jot's energy. Herrick is a gentle man, but his passion is no less powerful or compelling for his calm dignity. I found inspiration in many of my peers, like Jeff Siegel and Jeff Castor in the Florida Chapter, who transmitted their joy in the profession and what it stands for in everything they did. You felt proud to be a landscape architect when around them. Leaders should inspire pride in belonging, based on values and shared with clarity and grace.

Q4 How has ASLA helped develop your leadership skills and career?

I would be so boring if all I had to draw on was me. Being with landscape architects and related professionals is energizing. After every conference and meeting, I had ideas and questions to explore—and frequently not from the education sessions or meeting agendas. I needed to have back-and-forth conversations, to ask questions, to connect. The informal and spontaneous aspects of the meetings were as useful as the official reasons to be there. I get so much from ASLA because I participate.

