

Creating A Mentoring Program

By Mark A. Keller, SR/WA • Young Leadership Council Member



The Young Leadership Council met recently in Albuquerque, New Mexico at the International Right of Way Association's annual seminar. Major topics discussed included establishing guidelines to attract and retain new members. As a result, the YLC is committed to expanding membership by offering reduced new membership fees as well as a mentoring program geared toward right-of-way professionals seeking first-time IRWA membership and the SRWA designation. This article will briefly outline essential steps in fostering such a program.

History

IRWA was founded 65 years ago as the Southern California Right of Way Agent's Association. In 1980, it became the International Right of Way Association. The vision to attract membership through technical courses and seminars transformed a group of right-of-way practitioners into a professional organization with disciplines in appraisal, engineering, law, negotiation, public relations, property management and public service administration.

The vast development of the economies of the United States and Canada require right-of-way professionals to be involved in community, regional and national infrastructure improvements including highways, flood control projects, public utility construction, pipelines, railroads and all other public and quasi-public development activities.

Demographics

IRWA's decline in membership during the 1990s mirrors the overall demographic and economic changes in the United States. According to the October 1997 edition of *Money* magazine, the population is aging and by the year 2022, more than 35 percent of the U.S. residents will be age 50 or older.¹ Key demographics have been compiled over the past few years (see column two).

Issues

What does this mean? More importantly, where is IRWA going? What is IRWA all about?

The IRWA Mission Statement reads:

"The Mission of the International Right of Way Association is the unification of the efforts of its members toward individual development, improved service to employers and the public and improvement in the body of knowledge

related to the professional tasks of its members. To achieve their goals, the Association provides a Code of Ethics and Rules of Professional Conduct, a forum for the exchange and advancement of ideas, education courses and seminars and a program of professional development."

The IRWA Vision Statement reads:

*"The International Right of Way Association will be the leader and pre-eminent source of Right of Way educational and professional services worldwide."*²³

The need for establishing a new membership mentoring program is

Key Demographics

(Male 80%; Female 20%)

25-30	3.4%
31-40	18.5%
41-50	44.5%
51-60	23.9%
60+	9.7%

TOTAL 100%

Highest Level of Education

High School Graduate	3.0%
Some College	26.5%
Technical School	4.5%
Bachelors Degree	53.0%
Masters	9.0%
Ph.D.	1.5%
Other	2.5%

TOTAL 100%

Based on this information, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The average age of IRWA members is 41-50 years, with about 78 percent over 40.

- Education of a typical IRWA member includes a bachelor's degree, with a total of 97 percent having at least some college and technical schooling.

essential as a result of attrition and the anticipated need for future members to carry on the tremendous right-of-way infrastructure programs.

The following sections highlight the YLC's proposed mentoring program, short- and long-term goals and current research and resources available. Finally, a conclusion of this mentoring proposal is offered.

Resources

Based on information from the IRWA's Chapter Leadership Manual, 1999-2000 Edition, Section E under "Membership Information" highlights the importance of Membership Development and considers it the "most central of all IRWA Chapter activities." Several key points illustrate this:

- Contact "prospects" regularly (at least several times a year) and urge them to join IRWA.
- Invite non-members to attend Chapter programs; let them see the value of membership for themselves.
- Maintain lists of all prospects for membership, including nonmembers who attended an IRWA course, co-workers with IRWA, former members and other right-of-way professionals.⁴

The potential for new membership is tremendous and only 50 percent of the total potential membership are being addressed. The key leadership personnel in establishing a mentoring program are:

- Professional Development Committee
- Education Committee
- Public Awareness Committee
- Chapter Presidents
- Membership Committee

These committees are interrelated and share a wealth of information. A new membership program will be highlighted in a proposal based on attracting new members. →

Mentoring - A Key Concept

By definition, mentoring is a communication relationship between a senior organizational member (the mentor) and a more junior organizational member (the protege) as highlighted in Margaret H. Bahniuk and Susan Kogler Hill's article "Promoting Career Success Through Mentoring."⁵ According to Greek mythology, Ulysses entrusted the education of his son to a friend named Mentor, spawning the notion of mentoring. Further development between master and apprentice is deeply entrenched in tradition. Today, mentoring is widely used, having become a formal element in many management development programs established in the 1970s.

Proposed Mentoring Program

The YLC's mentoring program

involves the following key personnel in each Chapter:

- Chapter President
- Membership Chair
- SR/WAs

In establishing an initial program, the following activities need to take place:

- Chapter President takes leadership role in attracting new members based
 - on welcoming meetings.
 - Membership Chair is responsible for actively distributing new membership packets.
 - SR/WAs will be assigned at least one new member to monitor progress.

Other activities should include:

- Establish a subcommittee with the Marketing/Public Awareness Committee to actively seek out new professions and associate members. Presentations may be done at the local Community

Colleges and Universities as part of career days and current business and real estate clubs on campus. Retired SR/WAs could also participate in describing the rewards of being involved in the IRWA.

- National and local sponsorship of students pursuing careers in Real Estate. Contact Community College and University professors for assistance and feedback.

- Most importantly, IRWA needs to convey our Mission and Vision to other professional organizations and potential future members.

Goals

The short-term goal of this proposed mentoring program is to establish and foster a working relationship with the IEC. The long-term is to actively implement this program at both the national and local levels. The success of this proposed mentoring program depends on the commitment of current members.

Successful Mentoring Program Elements

Based on a recent article titled "Mentoring: A Results-Oriented Approach" by Eric and Bud Van Slyke, several key concepts were summarized as follows:

- Mentoring occurs at both the formal and informal setting.
- Identify potential at all levels. Used properly this can result in a greater variety of skilled members.
- Develop the right skills. Linking members to value-added activities. Build confidence and expertise.
- Develop individual employability for maximum flexibility and personal responsibility.
- Foster communication. The inte-

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gration of the new member into the IRWA at local and national levels. The lifeline of the IRWA depends on open channels of communication.

- Break down boundaries affecting high performance. The importance of improving morale and attitude is paramount to success.

- Reinforce organizational mission, vision and values. Productivity should increase by reinforcing organizational needs, objectives and goals. Clearly, IRWA exists for its members.⁶

Conclusion

IRWA is poised to take on this great opportunity to establish and implement a mentoring program at the local and national levels. The future holds potential for change and growth. Our destiny lies within all existing members, especially SR/WAs to attract and inspire future members to carry on the IRWA Mission and Vision. The basic steps and elements of a successful mentoring program need swift action. This action should be simple yet effective and measurable in terms of tracking overall success. The bottom line is the IRWA is at the crossroads in membership. Let everyone begin by sponsoring at least one new member and encouraging that new member to actively get involved. The rewards will be tremendous. ■

NOTES

¹Michael Sivy, *Money*, "What America will look like in 25 Years." 1997 October, p.98.

²International Right of Way Association Demographics.

³International Right of Way Association Chapter Leadership Manual, 1999-2000 Edition, 4.

⁴IBID, pp. 36-37.

⁵Margaret H. Bahniuk and Susan Kogler Hill, *Review of Business*, "Promoting Career Success through Mentoring." Spring 1998, p.4.

⁶Erik J. Van Slyke and Bud Van Slyke, *HR FOCUS*, "Mentoring: A Results-Oriented Approach." 1998 February, p.14.

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Prior to joining Universal Field Services, Donna had served as Assistant Right of Way Director including Chief Relocation Officer and Acquisition Supervisor for the Alabama Department of Transportation Bureau of Right of Way. Her major responsibilities included the supervision and direction of activities and operations of the Relocation Assistance, Property Management and Acquisitions Sections of the department.

Before being named Assistant Right of Way Director, Donna had been with the Alabama Department of Transportation since 1972 working her way up the ranks from the Accounting Department to Right of Way Specialist I through IV.

Donna attended Auburn University and is a Senior Member and past International President of the International Right of Way Association and a Certified Public Manager (CPM).



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