

DEAR DR. MAZIE,

Some of my coworkers recently returned from IRWA's Annual International Education Conference and told me how much I missed. I'm in an administration position and thought the conference was geared more toward seasoned professionals. Are there reasons I should be attending?

Karyn in Baton Rouge, LA

Yes! I think you are missing out – *really*. The Annual Conference has something for everyone, no matter whether you work in the public or private sector, have a high level position or you're just starting out.

What I see happening each year at the conference continues to impress me. It's a unique venue where professionals can make connections and share their challenges and war stories with others who already know what it's like to work in right of way. And conversations that start with sharing similar problems often lead to friendships, collaborations and teaming opportunities.

Many professional organizations are established because there is a need to bring like-minded professionals together for a common purpose, to fill a need that exists. Every industry has its own language, needs, challenges, problems and opportunities. Talking and sharing with folks in your own industry offers a validating and affirming experience.

In addition to networking, our industry needs to stay current and connected. At the conference, there are dozens of educational sessions that are presented by subject matter experts. With so many important industry topics to pick from, you're biggest dilemma will be deciding which ones to attend. There are also interesting keynote speakers who bring together humor and lessons learned in a fun and relaxing way.

Roughly 25 years ago, I was in a different profession and very active in an organization geared to my career needs. My affiliation and involvement awarded me numerous opportunities that I would not have been exposed to without it. And just like in that organization, IRWA has opened doors and exposed me to an entire industry of professional contacts.

Since businesses and agencies are known to change over time, an employee may need to find a new job. The exhibit hall is a great place to meet industry players and see what's happening in the profession. For job seekers, it's a chance to meet



with an enormous number of potential employers all in one place. There's also a First-Time Attendees Session designed to give you tips and tools to maximize your conference experience, as well as a great place to meet other first-timers. And at the Annual Awards Luncheon, you'll see what our members do to go over and beyond what's expected to help advance the industry and the Association.

There are many reasons why a professional organization exists. For IRWA, some of the reasons are to represent the industry with one clear voice, to set standards that enhance our professional image, to establish and maintain a strong ethical code, and to foster excellence in professional development and growth through training and education. I feel that IRWA's Annual Conference pulls all of this together in a venue that is comfortable and relaxed, and it unites us as professionals within our unique niche. It's an amazing place to learn and grow and get away from the daily demands of our jobs. Believe me, you will feel invigorated once you return to work.

Simply stated, if you have not attended one of the conferences or become active in your local IRWA Chapter, then you're missing out on something important, something that can enhance your professional and personal growth. The networking available through IRWA cannot be overstated – it is tremendous and an excellent resource for anyone who takes advantage of it. 🌟



A nationally recognized speaker, workshop leader and trainer, Dr. Mazie Leftwich, Psy.D has a clinical background in applied psychology with expertise in organizational and personal development. She is Senior Vice President of Contract Land Staff, LLC, where she oversees training and team excellence programs.