

The Tie that Binds

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There was a time a few years back that I found myself without an income. I had two children to raise and a mortgage to pay. I was just coming out of a very bad marriage and had not worked for over 10 years. To say I was living in fear is an understatement.

Getting back into the job market after such a long absence was not easy, even in the best of times. I no longer had any connections and had to essentially reinvent myself. I dug back into the skills I developed through previous jobs and experience gained while working with my dad, who was a real estate broker. Real estate sounded like a challenging career, so I began interviewing and found someone willing to take a chance on me. Starting as an Assistant Property Manager, I worked my way up the ladder. After four years of hands-on experience, I felt ready to start my own venture. Along with a partner, I was able to launch a successful property management company, ultimately growing from just the two of us to a staff of 14 employees.

Once I had achieved experience and success, I knew that I had a successful occupation. However, over time I felt something was missing. When situations arose when I needed some expert advice from others in my field, I had nowhere to turn. Seeking other professionals with similar experiences as mine, I discovered the world of professional associations. I located the one created for association managers – the Community Associations Institute (CAI). I joined CAI and began networking at local luncheons. Soon I progressed into taking formal course training. Investing in myself, I was able

to achieve the first two certifications in a very short time. I found what I was looking for – the professional connection.

Before long, the CAI recruited me to take the position of Executive Director of my local chapter. Transitioning from the role of a chapter member to a chapter leader would require a new network of colleagues. In seeking other association managers, I discovered



the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). Once again, I found the body of knowledge that I needed and was able to further develop my skills by attending annual conferences and other educational offerings. I joined ASAE and began to soak up all the information I could for enhancing my management skills. As an association manager, I learned that membership in an association is paramount—not only for survival—but for personal and professional growth.

When I left CAI to work for IRWA, I decided to maintain my membership in ASAE. Membership in an organization comprised of like-minded professionals is the tie that binds. No matter where I am employed, I have MY association to lean on. I turn to them for education, peer support and networking. I am also able to give back through their volunteer opportunities. Does this sound familiar?

As members of IRWA, you have an association that binds you to your profession. If you have worked through any of the professional development programs and earned a certification or designation, you have an even greater bond to the association. No matter where you are, IRWA is there for you - connecting you to like-minded professionals.

I am confident that membership in ASAE will help me advance in my career much like membership in IRWA has helped to advance yours. This year, I have set a goal to start working toward my Certified Association Executive (CAE) credential. Similar to the SR/WA, this is the highest credential available for association professionals. Like many of you, I will now need to juggle my work duties responsibilities with studying and participating in the educational courses required for my certification.

As I travel down this new career path, I hope to gain new insight that will allow me to better understand those of you working on your own certification or designation. I look forward to becoming a better leader and connecting with those of you who have chosen a similar path.