

Membership doesn't cost ... it pays!

Memoir of an Instructor's Clinic

S.J. Stephenson, SR/WA

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Instructor's Clinic—those simple words breed terror in the hearts of even the most courageous. I can remember every moment, in vivid Technicolor, of my Instructor's Clinic. I think the experience resembled boot camp more than anything else. Staying up all night to redo flip charts and rework exercises, the knotted stomach and sweaty palms of the first presentation, the nervous tension prior to the face-to-face evaluation, and the anxiety of waiting to find out if you had made the grade. Why would anyone volunteer for this kind of torture? Why would anyone pay good money and give up a weekend to be put through such an ordeal?

It is hard to explain what leads people to seek out this experience, but it is an opportunity to share a great sense of fulfillment in our occupation. Yet all you have to do is show up at an instructor's clinic or one of the "Train the Trainer" sessions at the International Seminar, and you will see it in action.

I recently changed assignments at work and was describing the "Instructor's Clinic" concept to my new boss. It amazed him that people would go through the process to be approved to teach, on their own time, and for less than "super star" pay. As we talked, he watched my enthusiasm grow, and he asked, "Are all right-of-way types so passionate about their profession?" I thought about the question for awhile and answered positively.

It is true, I believe, that we are passionate about our profession and passionate about sharing the knowledge we have acquired from so many others who were passionate too. You rarely find someone who has been around for more

than a couple of years who doesn't feel strongly about the value of the work we do. The ones who don't feel that way just don't stay around. The field tends to become a corps of evangelists preaching the rightness of the profession.

What better group to produce those valiant few who are willing to brave the terror and complete the gauntlet in the quest of the privilege of becoming an IRWA Instructor. During the three-day ordeal, they make friendships that will last a lifetime. They polish techniques to perfection. Everyone gains from the camaraderie. And the evaluators have an opportunity to practice their own skills and learn as much as they teach.

It has been my privilege, along with my two partners, Henry Hanson and

Larry Dupree, to conduct the most recent clinics in Minneapolis and Billings. It is a process much like a retreat. The evaluators and the candidates spend three nonstop days immersed in the learning process. Each of the three presentations by an instructor-candidate is critiqued by the group. One candidate at the last clinic gave us the terms "glow-ons" and "grow-ons", and they've been adopted for future use. The videotaping creates a little tension in the beginning, but the time goes by, the camera becomes less of a monster and ends up as just another evaluation tool. The clinics tend to produce some late night giggles, some amazing innovations, and some great results.

If you have ever had the urge to teach, or if you are teaching now in the community, I encourage you to give some serious thought to becoming an instructor for the IRWA. If you have that passion for your profession, and you want to have a piece of immortality, join us at the next clinic. Teaching is a great way to pay back all those who taught you. If you are like me, many of your mentors have left this world, so the only way to say thank you is to share their wisdom. This sharing gives you the chance to say, "I have touched tomorrow, for I teach today." □

S. J. "Sandie" Stephenson, SR/WA, has been an active member of the Association since 1982, having served at the Chapter, Regional, and Industry Committee levels. She was twice honored as a finalist for the Frank C. Balfour International Professional of the Year. Sandie is currently assigned to a multimedia interactive training group as a course developer and subject matter expert in the area of right-of-way for US WEST Communications, Inc.