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The Road to Becoming an Expert

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As I travel around the country teaching IRWA courses, I am frequently asked, “How did you learn so much about the Uniform Act?” In the beginning, I would laugh to myself and think about the people I knew to be experts on the subject, like Howard Armstrong, Jim Finnegan, Linda Kitchen-Peck, Rick Etter and Ron Fannin, to name a few. Now, I proudly hold the URA Certification that tells the users of our services, the membership and the profession, that I have the education and the experience to call myself an expert. So how did that happen? Can it happen for anyone and in any discipline our industry represents?

As I contemplated how it happened for me, I realized that my knowledge didn’t come from being special. It happened because I took full advantage of the professional development opportunities IRWA has to offer. I would like to share what had particular impact for me. Perhaps it might help you develop some steps in your own journey.

Taking and Teaching Classes

Taking classes is the most effective way of learning, refreshing and enhancing the concepts in the many disciplines our Association represents. As I mapped out my path toward the SR/WA, I was exposed to how these different disciplines came together to create a project plan and schedule. That connection gave me an understanding of the profession that I could not have gained by on-the-job training. I soon realized how much I enjoyed relocation classes and decided to specialize in the Uniform Act. I took every course IRWA had to offer, and some from other organizations. When you add the connection to other professionals and their experiences, suddenly I had so many new resources to solve complex problems on a project. Teaching offers that same connection. In fact, I learn more than I teach in every class without exception. I have gained so much from interacting with others who share the same interests.

Attending Events

Attending events is the best way to build relationships, create a professional network, and enhance your opportunities within a discipline, industry, or the profession

as a whole. Attending Chapter meetings, Region Forums, education seminars, and the Annual Conference provides exposure to decision-makers, experts, prospective clients and potential employers in the industry. Make it a point to introduce yourself to as many people as possible. Offer to moderate a session related to a subject in which you are hoping to excel. Volunteer to speak about a unique problem that you helped to solve. The more exposure you have to the people interested and working in your discipline or industry, the more you will enhance your own knowledge.

Joining Groups

Which leads me to my favorite professional development opportunity - joining a Community of Practice. If your goal is to become an expert in a particular discipline, what better way than to surround yourself with its current leaders? A community of practice gives every member the opportunity to be a part of a group that is interested in elevating their own knowledge and sharing it with others. It’s a group of subject matter experts, those who want to become a subject matter expert and those who want to engage with both.

My affiliation with the relocation community is where my knowledge of complex relocation solutions evolved. Anyone can throw a question to the group and stories of similar circumstances start pouring in. A potential solution will emerge and be refined through the exchange until everyone has new ideas they can use at the next opportunity. Being active with this group took my knowledge and experience to the next level.

Currently, our Association has five Communities of Practice: Relocation Assistance, Asset Management, Environmental, Surveying/Engineering and Valuation. Several others are in discussion. If you are interested in more information about a particular community of practice, check IRWA’s website and contact either the Chair of the Community of Practice or your Region Chair.

It is time to put your plan together - your map to becoming an expert. In others words, yes, it can happen for anyone. More importantly, it can happen for you!