

President Elect — Who, Me?

Neil Johnson

There it was — the dreaded voice mail message. “I would like to talk with you at the PPC.” Uh-oh. . . . And then, in Toronto, I catch sight of the person who left the message coming across the hospitality suite toward me. What could this be about? “You want me to do what? Put my name forward as a candidate for President Elect of CSHP? You must be mistaking me for someone else.”

But no, the request was sincere. And so began the decision-making process. Did I want to serve as President Elect?

The concept of volunteering has always intrigued me. People volunteer in a wide array of activities: from Scouts and Guides to parent-teacher associations, from church groups and charitable groups to political parties. Their reasons for volunteering are as varied as the individuals themselves. In addition, the time and energy committed by volunteers can be (and usually is) extensive. This is particularly true for CSHP, which has always thrived on its members' extensive volunteerism.

The volunteer not-for-profit community is very active in Canada, and much has been written about why people volunteer. In scanning the not-for-profit literature, however, one notices that very little has been written about why professionals volunteer for leadership positions within their professional organizations. Last year I had the opportunity to examine this issue as part of a not-for-profit management course. During our research we surveyed nine individuals in medical and paramedical professional organizations, a sample that included 5 past CSHP Presidents.

Space does not permit me to reproduce the entire essay here, but the most frequent responses to the question “Why did you volunteer?” included the following: a commitment to the organization and a belief in its values, a sense of professional obligation, and the person's belief that he or she possessed the skills required to do the work. Many also cited the opportunity to grow personally and to network with others. All of the respondents had a long history of volunteering during their careers.

Rereading our term paper as I mulled over the invitation to “run for office”, I began to understand some

of my own decision-making process. In many respects it differed little from that of my colleagues. A commitment to the organization? Check. Since joining CSHP, I've always been committed to its mission and values. I have also been interested in the Society's external relations, which is an inherent component of my portfolio as External Liaison. A sense of professional obligation? Check. As a member of this profession, I have always believed that being a pharmacist means more than just having a job and that being a professional means giving back to the profession. And possession of the skills required? Check. When I was approached to consider this position, I chatted with several members of the CSHP Executive. I asked a variety of questions: Can I make a difference? Do I have the skills to help our team? After a few nervous moments of anticipation, the answers came back in the affirmative. My decision was complete.

A personal request to volunteer is the act that, in many cases, tips the balance and leads people to offer their time and talents. That's how I became involved in CSHP Council activities and, as I have learned from talking with CSHP members across the country, it's how many of our Society's volunteers became involved in various aspects of CSHP business. Being asked to participate in the Society as President Elect is an honour. And just as I was asked to volunteer, you can be sure that I will be actively recruiting you to volunteer.

So when you receive a voice mail or e-mail message from me or see me approaching, watch out! It may be your turn!



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