

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

My LinkedIn Machine Hasn't Rung All Day



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Forgive my whining. It has a purpose.

On a regular basis I get an email honoring me with an invitation to join someone's LinkedIn or Facebook group. The invitation email is not sent from the person directly and cannot be replied to, so I assume that the person authorizing it does not really want to link-in with me very badly. In order to accept the invitation I am directed to create a new LinkedIn or Facebook account where I will be able to receive an endless flow of non-related messages and advertisements (many about U.S. Representative Weiner or Charlie Sheen I assume) that do nothing to move my planned agenda for the day forward, but does give me access to countless vacation photos of people I don't know, but whom I assume are some degrees closer to Kevin Bacon than I am.

To ensure that I am not appearing to ignore the person (assuming I really know them) who authorized the robotic email to be sent to me in the first place (after the fifth reminder email, incredulous that I haven't yet responded to the invitation of adding a notch onto the holster of the represented sender), I must now take the time to send a new email (now the 'pong' of on-line communications that are longer than a 'tweet' but shorter in length than the Pentagon Papers) or make a telephone call apologizing for my obvious lack of participation in expected technology protocol, and assuring them that I really do value their friendship and professional collegiality, even without a personal Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter account to prove it.

Further diminishing this new direction that now cuts across every level

of our global society, is the shield of anonymity and perceptual power that technology has provided to those who choose to reign in all good sense and human caring when they are allowed to say and insinuate anything behind an assumed moniker on-line, never having to identify themselves, raise their hand, volunteer to be part of a solution, or dignify any conversation with proof, facts or actions. It seems enough to simply shoot and complain; perhaps damage the good that is being attempted by others; all without fear or risk of being held accountable. Even the 'good old days' of Letters-to-the-Editor (Remember newspapers?) required a signature to voice an opinion.

Now, I will deny that this admonition and perceptual whining has anything to do with age (something anyone my age would wisely do), but more honestly it is with great concern that we are losing the true understanding of what it truly means to be linked-in; to be a part of something positive; to be a part of something bigger than each of us as individuals.

There is no question that a worldwide web exists around us, with branches both close to home and globally. A network so powerful and connected that it can influence actions and touch lives in virtually every corner of our planet. I have the pleasure of witnessing, participating in, and benefiting from that network every day, on and off-line; but it starts by building one-on-one relationships with other people. Through actual conversations and human interaction, that leads to friendships and partnerships, which lead to trust, and loyalty, and respect. That is the real power; without

which numbers or holster notches are meaningless. People who will respond to you because to them you are important; to them you are an 'influential'. From those foundations great ideas can take seed, communities can be changed, great wrongs can be righted, and great visions can be imagined.

In the past several weeks alone, I have had multiple opportunities to serve the greater good through the network that I have been able to build and access during my career as part of the common industry that we share; through the IFEA; through many of you individually; in seven distinct global regions, working hand-in-hand with one another to create new possibilities. In some cases that service was simply offering an opinion or words of encouragement; in others it was bringing two or more groups of people together who could benefit one-another. Some required hands-on assistance, use of specific skill sets or influence; and in some instances it was more about setting examples and sparking imaginations of what might be.

Technology has provided us all with many new tools that, when used properly, can be great resources. When we allow them to divide us; to control us; to create chasms between us vs. paths to unite us; then we have gone too far off course. I personally am doubling my efforts to avoid that trap, and I encourage everyone to protect and re-engage the days of human interaction. Our industry, above all, must understand the importance of keeping people, communities and the world connected; ourselves included.

I look forward to your calls. My Linked-In machine hasn't rung all day.