



CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

(Taken from the opening comments of the 63rd Annual IFEA Convention, Expo & Retreat)

“Isn’t it the way we perceive things, that makes them what they will be?”

– Eugene Cernan, Commander of Apollo XVII

Throughout my life and career, I have had the very good fortune to have my own perspectives shaped and influenced by a remarkable assemblage of individuals and experiences whose paths have crossed with my own – some briefly; others intertwined for many years, if not a lifetime – but all with a lasting impact that follows me like a strand of DNA; sometimes lying dormant until I need to call upon it. Perhaps when we talk about leaving a legacy, it is those often-unknown impacts, that we may have had on others through our own lives and careers, that live on after we are gone.

Captain Gene Cernan, Commander of Apollo XVII and the last man to walk on the moon (who passed away in 2017), was one of those whose paths I crossed along my journey. Commander Cernan served on the Board of Directors for Up with People when I was still young, impressionable and in the early years of my professional career, lending his memoirs and his own perspectives of ‘home’, as he looked back on earth from space (a quarter-million miles away), to the composition of a popular Up with People song titled ‘Moon Rider.’ His vision of a world bonded together, without borders or fighting or fear, became a part of the foundation for my own perspectives and perceptions and hopes for our world.

Revisiting that song today, I realized that the ‘home’ that Commander Cernan fondly saw when he looked back at the earth from space, is the ‘home’ that we all have the great honor and responsibility of creating. We are the industry that bonds our communities and world together; that encourages people to lower their defenses; to embrace new experiences; to reach beyond their comfort zones; to highlight our diversity; and to celebrate who we all are when we are at our best. In a world that can sometimes seem to be going in directions we don’t

understand, we have the unique opportunity to use our events to bring perspective, to change perspectives, to enhance perspectives, and to welcome new perspectives to our greater global conversations.

Marc Forster, Director of the recently released movie ‘Christopher Robin,’ noted in an interview that “it is our perspective that makes a place feel either mundane or special.” And I would offer that it is our industry that provides the ‘special’ that creates and provides the magic, the memories, and the milestones that touch lives and change perspectives in every community, on every continent, in every corner of our planet. What an honor and an obligation we share!

I gained an important perspective, years ago, from a very dear friend and professional peer, Jean McFaddin, Producer of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade for 25 years and the true ‘Miracle on 34th St.’ In an IFEA presentation, Jean told us all that, “as festival and event organizers, we are medics of the heart. Certainly, we are concerned and responsible for the fiscal and other needs of our events, but we don’t do events for the dollars; we do them for the looks of joy and wonder on the faces of the parents and kids who attend. That’s the big payoff we have in common. We are the industry that fuels the hearts of our communities.”

Sadly, Jean – a true icon in our industry - passed away in April of this year and I was asked to deliver a part of her eulogy in New York City. In my preparation for that daunting and emotional role she continued to teach me new things, like the importance of our personal perspectives and taking time to stop along our journeys to recognize, understand and enjoy just what we have accomplished and provided to so many.

In a video interview that I discovered (by Christina Abt, in her ‘64 and More’ series), Jean described something that all of us in our business work for every day. In 2001 (her last year directing the Macy’s Parade) she described, with a definite gleam in her eye, and an obvious smile in her heart, the fondest of her memories:

“I walked down to Columbus Circle, with Suzy (her beloved partner),” she said; “and we were standing there with my guys – the police; the head of the police, who I love – and here comes the parade. And if I ever knew I was successful in my life, it was

in that moment. That was just a great moment. It was confetti in the sky; every level was filled with colors; the people were cheering; there was not a space on the ground or in the sky; it was just color. And all the kids were happy...and it was a great, great moment."

And I understood. As I am sure all of you can.

Having that personal perspective of what we get to do and produce, every day, in every corner of the world, is what keeps most of us going. And ensuring that the generations of industry professionals that follow (ourselves included) will use that perspective to be more, do more and dream more, for our communities and our world, would be a legacy that Jean would be proud to have fostered.

In that same video, Jean was asked if she 'marched to her own drummer or followed the crowd' and Jean responded (not surprisingly) that she marched to her own drummer, just as most of her friends march to their own drummers, but while still caring about others. She noted that "I don't want to march to my own drummer just for me and my values. I want to do what makes the world a better place. I would like to think that I / we are part of a great rebellion, a great body, who protects a variety of values and rights; not just mine; but who is against all those who would take away somebody else's rights. A part of a mass who wants a better world, equal and good for all."

I, personally, as I hope all of you are, am proud to be a part of Jean's great rebellion and to continue her vision. And, on that plane of thought, I would like to take this opportunity to challenge everyone here, and in our broad global industry, to leverage and commit your skills, your passions and your events to making that positive difference in our world...to one life and countless thousands; to one community and the global village that we share.

Together, we have an opportunity, like no other industry, to influence our world and to celebrate who we are when we are at our best. And it all starts with our perspective.

By definition, our perspective is a particular attitude toward or way of regarding things; our point of view. Our perspectives are created, shaped, changed and influenced throughout our lives by our parents and families; our peers – both social and professional; our experiences; our travels; our education; and even our mistakes, as we learn from them what we don't want to do again! They are our personal windows to the world around us and how we view things through those windows.

Now, imagine if we were to only view our world, our events, our communities, et al. Through only one window. We might never imagine the possibilities; dream the dreams; or build the experiences that could change our world. But if we were to view and understand our world through many different windows, think of how that would frame our point-of-view differently; change what we create; how we interact with others; and what we could imagine together.

I just finished working with the 'Spirit of Boise Balloon Classic' over this past Labor Day weekend; an event that I co-founded 28 years ago and that has continued on, under the direction of a very good friend, as a valued reflection of who our community is at its best.

Throughout the five-day event this year...perhaps the benefit of being a step removed from the daily operational details... I was drawn to and able to clearly focus on the many different stakeholders - and perspectives – that are impacted by and must be considered for that event to be successful: the event staff; the host city; the volunteers; the launch venue and the (not always planned or known) landing venues; the balloon pilots; the sponsors; the media; the neighbors; the vendors; law

enforcement, security and emergency responders; the host hotel properties; our local tourism agencies; the performers; and, of course, the attendees – broken into many sub-categories of kids, parents, (lost kids and lost parents), visitors, residents, gender and age groupings, those with disabilities, photographers (it is a balloon event), and the dreamers...those who are, in some way, emotionally or professionally touched, inspired, or otherwise motivated by the experience that we have provided...and I'm sure that list is still not all-inclusive.

Stakeholders who each clearly has their own perspectives and personal set of filters on their windows to the world; of what the event means to them; why they are a part of it; and what they need, hope or expect to get out of their role and participation. Stakeholders whose perspectives may change every year, every day, or minute-by-minute. Stakeholders whom all of us must be intricately aware of, concerned with and prepared to serve through your own events.

An amazing challenge, but when we can successfully create a common perspective of value between all stakeholders; a perspective of being part of something larger than any singular need; it can be truly be a great, great moment.

To excel at what we do; to change the world; to provide the best possible experience and returns for every stakeholder and stakeholder group; we must commit ourselves to opening new dialogues; looking through new windows; and seeing the world from new perspectives.

We see one of the IFEA's most important roles, as providing all of you – our stakeholders – with access to as many global perspectives as possible; from all those whom you work with, as partners, providers and peers. Perspectives that will hopefully expand and alter how you see your own events, your communities and our world.

I believe that you will find those perspectives in all of the many programs, conventions, publications, webinars, and global networks that we do our best to provide, connect and expand every day. Your challenge is to take advantage of who is around you; to start the conversations; to make the introductions; to set your current perspectives aside and be open to new possibilities.

If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change. And where some will see nothing; others will see a world of possibility.

It pleased me to no end that we had representatives with us at the IFEA convention in San Diego this year from 15 countries and each of our 7 global regions, all of whom recognize the unique power of festivals and events to bond our communities and world closer together.

Professional peers with a desire to share their own experiences and challenges; to learn from one another; to improve their skills; to raise all boats; and to embrace and shape our own global perspectives. Perspectives that can change our world.

And as our industry does what it does best, producing and providing festivals and events and experiences around the globe...from the lakes of New Zealand to the lantern-filled skies of Thailand; from the holiday celebrations of Europe to the mud festivals of South Korea; from the Samba Drome of Brazil to the streets of Pasadena; from the winter carnivals of China to the deserts of the Middle East; from the gardens of Singapore to the roses of Portland; from the family traditions of Mexico to the neighborhood festivals of the United States; from the village celebrations of South Africa to the cities of Australia; and all the countless others that fill each of our respective communities, every day...it is my hope that from wherever Gene Cernan and Jean McFaddin are viewing us from, they will always see 'home.'