

MEMO

TO: Gordon Nary- Thought Leaders Journal

FROM: Larry Kulchawik

RE: Discovering the Exhibit Industry

DATE: January 13, 2015

Did you Discover the Exhibit Industry? Or did it Discover you?

I recently read an article about how most of us working in the trade show industry had discovered it by accident. Everyone has a story to tell about how they got started in the industry.

Every time I get a chance to speak about the Expo/Event Industry, to people in the expo business, I tell the same story...

“The trade show and events industry generates \$100 billion in revenue in the US. It ranks #22 in contribution to the GNP, higher than agriculture and the printing industry, yet few, if any, in this room have gone to school specifically to get into it. We have each fumbled into it.” We all have our own unique story about how it all began for us. As a result, we have each discovered an industry we have grown to love, and are proud of the good fortune that we have fallen in to.

In many cases, the educational training we received before discovering this industry directly and indirectly applied to jump-start our success. So to say that no one has training in our industry is incorrect. We all have had training in one form or the other that applied to make us successful in the exhibit marketing business.

The question I now raise is “Should an industry this powerful and influential continue to attract its talent *by accident*? Or is it time to start attracting talent *on purpose*?”

Why not promote and provide training programs designed to prepare our future with the needed skills to grow face to face marketing?

In spite of our many self-taught industry experts, we have become darn good at what we do for the clients we serve.

EDPA and other industry groups have supported exhibit design education programs for many years. The undergraduate exhibit design degree program at Bemidji State and the master’s degree program at FIT in NYC both are assisted and supported by EDPA and its company members. The graduates of these programs will not have the same stories to tell



as we all have. Did you discover the exhibit industry, or did it find you? We all needed a job and began without ever realizing the depth and opportunities that awaited us.

My good friend Richard Erschik has been in the exhibit industry for the past 40 years. He has been a top educational speaker at the Exhibitor Show for 18 years and now lives in South Florida conducting educational webinars directed to show organizers and exhibiting professionals.

Rich recently amended his popular webinar entitled “Get the MOST from PRE-DURING-POST trade show exhibiting” to include a prominent section that describes expo associations as a valuable source to discover viable career opportunities for college graduates and service veterans looking for work.

Aside from his involvement in the trade show industry, Rich is the president of his local Toastmasters Club, a Viet Nam veteran, the instructor of the Miami Dade college’s Young Entrepreneur’s Academy program, and an active South Dade chamber board member serving on their Marketing and Military Affairs Committees.

“When I mention dedicated industry associations and the trade show industry to college student members of Toastmasters, and the military personnel I interact with at Homestead Air Reserve Base, they never heard of either” Richard said.

Another industry veteran, Jeff Bartle, Chief Creative Officer at 3D Exhibits, Inc got his degree in industrial design in Detroit and looked to be an auto designer. Somehow one thing led to another and he found himself designing exhibits for the auto industry. Jeff has been a major supporter of exhibit design education for many years and continues to do so.

There are many opportunities to consider in the world of trade show marketing. The trade show industry and its suppliers need to be more visible to them because they don’t know what they don’t know.

As the expo/event industry continues to grow we should thank our lucky stars for our unique discoveries in finding careers we love. Let’s continue to build awareness of the trade show industry so that more will *dive into* the industry intentionally rather than *falling into* the expo industry by accident.