

Rixio Medina, ASSE President-Elect



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President-Elect Rixio Medina, CSP, CPP, learned early in life about worker safety. Several generations of his family worked in the oil and gas industry, so he often heard stories of significant incidents, fires and explosions.

As a teenager, he became interested in learning more about why these events occurred and how they affected the workers and families involved. “The communities where we lived were tight-knit,” he says. “Whenever an incident occurred, it was on people’s minds for a long time.”

Medina’s interest was further piqued when he learned more about protecting workers from someone with a degree in fire protection and safety who encouraged him to seek a formal education in the field. “The fit seemed right, so, shortly after high school I decided I was going into occupational safety and health,” he says.

Focus on People

For Medina, the people aspect of the safety profession is particularly appealing. “People are what our profession is about. Sure, we help protect property and ensure business continuity, but it has always been the people who motivate me to go the extra mile,” he says.

That means going well beyond being competent and knowledgeable. “We have to confirm that the programs and processes we develop are actually working and providing the expected level of protection to workers,” he notes.

Over the course of his 38-year career, Medina has found many occasions to be grateful to be a safety professional. The most memorable are when people personally express their thanks for what the company is doing for them.

“The interactions with people in the field are the best encouragement,” he explains. “Like working with a contractor who noticed, for example, the processes our company had in place to ensure that work was done correctly, that people had the appropriate tools, that there was an intent to perform tasks safely.”

Commit to Continuous Learning

Medina’s desire to continuously learn has served him well throughout his career. And by learning, he is not only referring to gaining new technical knowledge, although that certainly is important to a successful career. “I was the first employee with a degree in occupational safety hired by my

organization,” he explains. “People viewed me as a source of technical information about different types of hazards, conditions and controls.”

What he did not have, however, was practical experience. Having never worked in a refinery, Medina set out to understand the practical side of the business and to learn about the work. “You can be an expert in occupational safety and health, but you have to know how work is performed, what materials and equipment are used, what processes are used,” Medina says. “I took the time to understand the work itself and how people performed that work.”

And that, he says, translated into greater credibility in the field. “People saw me not as just a safety person, but as a safety person who wanted to learn about what they did each day.”

That credibility builds trust and ultimately helps employees become more committed to safety.

“The more acceptance you gain from those you are trying to protect, the more they respect what you are trying to do and the more they engage,” Medina says. Medina also spent time learning his company’s language and exploring the business side of operations. “I wanted to know how I could help achieve business goals with what I had in my toolbox,” he explains.

That approach put him on senior management’s radar. “They recognized I was interested in helping the business be more profitable and successful. Combined with my work in safety, that was a winning formula for gaining greater responsibility and new assignments.”

Over the course of his career, Medina’s assignments took him far and wide, moving him from refineries to operational sites to corporate headquarters. Each new location presented unique challenges, and embracing those challenges put his career on an upward trajectory.


“It was a great way to learn from many different perspectives and about different segments of the business,” he observes. “It helped me better understand the company, which opened many new opportunities, locally and internationally.”

Accept the Invitation to Participate

When Medina attended Oklahoma State University from 1975 to 1977, the school did not yet have an ASSE student section. But he and his fellow students knew about the Society and attended meetings of the Tulsa Chapter a few times a year.

After graduating, Medina worked overseas for 12 years. Upon returning, Medina knew he was staying in the U.S., so he decided it was time to connect

Rixio E. Medina, CSP, CPP, is currently ASSE’s President-Elect and will become the Society’s president on July 1, 2018. Medina is president and principal consultant of Rixio Medina & Associates LP. He has 38 years’ OSH experience in oil and gas, including senior-level positions with CITGO Petroleum Corp., BP and Mobil. An ASSE Fellow, he was appointed by U.S. President George W. Bush to serve on CSB. He also served four terms on the National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health and was BCSP president in 2013. Medina holds an M.S. from the University of Central Missouri and a B.S. in Engineering Technology, Fire Protection and Safety from Oklahoma State University.



with the ASSE network and continue his education. "I knew ASSE was a good source of technical information and a good way to network. It felt like a good fit for my professional goals."

When he first joined ASSE, his only intent was to be a member. "My goal was to benefit from all the good things that ASSE offers," he notes.

But, as is the case for many who become volunteer leaders, someone asked him to do just a bit more. A member of the Imperial Calcasieu Chapter asked him to be chapter treasurer. And, thus, began a journey that will see Medina become Society president on July 1, 2018.

"There has always been someone, be it another member, a colleague or an ASSE staff member, who opened the door and encouraged me to serve in some capacity," Medina says.

His chapter-level service led to membership on several Society-level task forces and committees. That involvement naturally led to other opportunities, such as engaging in an initiative with the Department of Labor and serving as an ASSE Foundation trustee.

According to Medina, his experiences demonstrate the power of someone simply asking you to contribute. "It is gratifying when someone asks you to participate," he says. "When someone recognizes in you some desired attributes for serving the Society, then is willing to help you achieve your potential, that is a powerful motivator."

Medina is appreciative of those who have offered him guidance, and he believes mentoring is a key responsibility of ASSE's current volunteer leaders. "We must look after those interested in growing into leadership roles as well as our up-and-coming young professionals."

Looking ahead to what he wants to accomplish during his term as president, Medina points to the four strategic pillars the board of directors has focused during the past few years: member communities, education, standards and advocacy. "We have defined these goals very well, and I want to focus on driving us toward even greater success in these areas," he says.

In particular, Medina believes initiatives such as the OHS Professional Capability Framework, ASSE's work on human capital issues through Center for Safety and Health Sustainability, the Society's research agenda, and its focus on bringing more women, veterans and Hispanics into the safety profession and the Society are significant

steps forward. "I want to concentrate on the initiatives we have in play so that we can achieve the greatest possible successes," he says. Medina also will strive to help ASSE enhance its interactions with employers, OSH organizations and other stakeholders.

Guide the Next Generation

When asked what advice he can share with young professionals or those transitioning to safety from another career, Medina offers several action steps.

1) Develop a generalist knowledge base on the different topics that the profession addresses.

2) Concentrate on two or three aspects to develop specializations and become an expert in those areas. "Many young and new professionals struggle because they are trying to learn too many subjects," he explains. "To better serve clients, customers and employers, develop a broad-based knowledge, then concentrate on a few topics of interest. And know where to go to get guidance on topics outside your expertise."

3) Join ASSE. "ASSE is the logical place to be as a safety professional," Medina says. "You get access to people, resources and information. And you have the chance to build lifelong relationships that will keep you connected no matter where you are in the world."

4) Get involved. "By engaging in different activities within ASSE, you will gain skills that directly transfer to your workplace," Medina explains. "You will become a better collaborator and a more effective team builder. You will learn how to more effectively discuss technical subjects. These skills are extremely valuable in the workplace."

Medina is honored that members elected him to serve as president of the world's oldest professional safety organization, and he encourages all members to embrace the many opportunities ASSE affords them. "As an immigrant safety professional with a proud Hispanic heritage, I am humbled that I will soon serve as president," he concludes. "ASSE has provided me a platform on which to grow and learn personally and professionally. If I can do this, anyone with the passion and desire to serve can too."

ASSE to ASSP: It Is Who We Are

Medina is excited about the upcoming change in organizational name from American Society of Safety Engineers to American Society of Safety Professionals.

"We are more clearly defining who we are," he says. "Our members hold different qualifications and certifications, yet we collectively work to ensure a safer, stronger future. It will be a privilege to serve as the first official president under our new name."