

Changing World Demands Proactive Preparation



Rick Pollock

I love this time of year, as winter approaches and another year draws to a close. It is a time to be thankful, as well as a time to reflect and plan for the future.

As this year passes, ASSE has now seen 101 new chapters written. Each year brings a fresh start with exciting new opportunities. This past year was no different, setting in motion many new opportunities. Change is, indeed, in the wind.

Sensing this change, ASSE's Board of Directors formed a 50-member task force of past presidents and a diverse group of members to discuss the Society's future and governance structure. This group reviewed demographic and survey data, examined research about trends in other professional associations and read books about association governance. The task force also was provided with an "environmental scan" of the world in which ASSE operates and in which we perform our jobs. This scan covered global realities and trends in economics, politics, technology, demographics, education, the nature of work, risks and risk management, and the SH&E profession itself.

I subsequently shared this scan with many members, and I'd like to share some highlights with you.

•**Economics.** A global shift is occurring. Telecommunications and transportation have shrunk the globe and competition among multinationals is increasing. China will likely overtake the U.S. economy by 2020 and India may do so by 2050. Stakeholders have higher expectations and lower tolerance. Emphasis

on sustainability and improved corporate governance continues to grow.

•**International politics.** Building dissatisfaction is creating greater demand for political and economic transparency. Growth and economic disparity continue to fuel instability. E-activism is growing, fueled by communication technology, and the global political influence of China, India, Brazil, Russia and the Middle East increases.

•**U.S. demographics.** The U.S. population is graying, living longer and retiring later. Technology and Social Security concerns are fueling a widening generation gap. Too few citizens hold college degrees in engineering and the sciences, with one-third of all Ph.D.s awarded to temporary visa holders.

•**Technology.** In our interconnected global society, 2 billion PCs and 5 billion mobile phones are in use, and more than 2.1 billion people use the Internet. Social networking is expanding opportunities for

engagement and communications. Eighty percent of Americans age 18 to 29 and 50% of all Americans use online social networking.

•**Education.** Innovations continue to emerge rapidly. More than 30% of corporate education and training is delivered by e-learning, while e-books comprise more than 20% of the market, and will continue to gain more market share. By 2015, South Korea plans to digitize all school learning materials, and China has already spent more than \$1 billion to pioneer e-learning in rural areas. In the U.S., more than 1,000 school districts have or are budgeting to purchase iPads for incoming freshmen.

•**Nature of work.** U.S. workers face an emerging and increasing set of risks. The workforce is aging, while losing competitiveness due to the lack of technical education. U.S. workers risk becoming less valuable, yet they face higher workloads, longer hours, increased pressures for greater productivity, and increased use of irregular and flexible work schedules.

•**Implications for ASSE.** Change will continue to occur rapidly, making an expanded global perspective and understanding critical. Increased and evolving risks will present opportunities for qualified SH&E professionals, as will the expanding focus on good corporate governance and sustainability.

•**The SH&E profession.** Demand is surpassing the supply of qualified professionals. More employers are seeking SH&E professionals with graduate degrees and M.B.A.s, while the number of qualified professors to teach courses is declining. Employers are expecting greater fluency in international cultures, foreign languages and global SH&E topics. Research-to-practice will gain momentum as the profession embraces fact-based solutions. More will be learned about human factors, and SH&E professionals will play a greater role in process and work design.

Our world is clearly different than it was 18 years ago when we last reviewed ASSE's governance structure and strategic focus. Technology has changed how we operate, and the pace of change requires ASSE to be more nimble and data-driven, to plan and react faster, and to think strategically for the benefit of all members.

In the months ahead, you will hear more about this initiative as we create a structure for the future. As the world continues to change, ASSE and each of us must be prepared.

Richard A. Pollock, CSP

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"Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future."

John F. Kennedy

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