

PS Asks

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PS: You recently co-led a delegation of safety professionals to China. Can you provide some brief details on the delegation and its mission, as well as about your role as co-leader?

Pam: The delegation of 47 safety professionals from ASSE traveled to Beijing and Shanghai from November 6, 2010 until November 15, 2010. The mission of the group was to exchange ideas, best practices, and concepts related to occupational safety and health management and to develop ongoing professional relationships that will lead to the improvement of workplace processes and reduce the number of injuries, illnesses and fatalities in both countries.

The specific tasks of our trip were to:

- Discuss mutual expanded educational, training, and networking opportunities to improve the professional proficiency of those engaged in the price of protecting people, property and the environment.
- Provide and increase informational resources to support the knowledge and professional efforts of those engaged in incident prevention.
- Demonstrate new and improved products and services meeting the needs of professionals managing occupational safety and health programs.
- Discuss current occupational safety and health trends impacting both countries.
- Identify emerging business and industry trends that impact workplace injuries, illnesses and fatalities, such as safety management practices for nanotechnology.
- Discuss existing workplace safety and health management practices.
- Recommend areas for ongoing mutual collaboration.

As co-leader my tasks were to assist our leader Chris Patton with all of the pre-travel activities, including maintaining contact with the delegation members, soliciting information on potential meetings from the delegates, and facilitating delegation members who wished to provide a presentation during the trip. Prior to departure, Chris and I spent a lot of time in contact with People to People International, the non-profit organization who organized the specifics of the trip and provided guides and translators to us while there. We worked with them to develop the itineraries, program content and meeting topics. Chris and I were also responsible to coordinate the professional gifts brought on the trip by delegation members.

Once there, our tasks were to work with our national guides from People to People to organize a delegate briefing, attend the scheduled professional meetings, introduce the delegation at each meeting, coordinate the question and answer periods, and work with the delegation members to assure that the trip met their expectations. Chris and I wanted to make sure we took advantage of the specific delegate members' skills and expertise during our professional meetings so that they could participate more fully in the meetings. For example, when we visited a hospital construction site, we asked the five delegate members who work in the construction industry to lead the question and answer session.

PS: What led to your selection as co-leader? Why did you decide to get involved?

Pam: When the letter arrived inviting me to participate in the delegation I was really interested in going. I had recently traveled to Bahrain for the ASSE Middle East Chapter PDC and found that international travel and meeting my fellow safety professionals in other parts of the world was tremendously

fulfilling. I wanted to experience that again. It was a bit of a stretch to take part in two international trips in less than one year, but I decided that I didn't want to pass up the opportunity.

As I understand it, the Executive Committee was hoping that they could get 15 ASSE members to sign up, which was the minimum number People to People requires to organize a trip. But within a few weeks the delegation had grown to over 40 members and People to People actually ended up closing the application process and starting a waiting list. Because the delegation was so large, People to People required us to have a co-leader to help with the various tasks. Chris Patton told me that the Executive Committee approved asking me to take on that role. When Chris asked me it was, as they say, a "no-brainer" to accept the honor.

PS: What struck you most about China's culture, particularly as it relates to workplace safety?

Pam: The common belief that much of day to day life in China is managed by the government is certainly true with regards to how workplace safety is managed and implemented. And because we were the guests, our hosts wanted to present themselves and the status of workplace safety in a favorable light; much as we would have done if they were visiting our country. But in each one of the professional meetings there was a point where our hosts acknowledged that they had some serious problems, as evidenced by the injury and fatality rates. However, they always found a way to convey that message without losing face, which is an important part of any type of professional and personal interaction. While there was no indication that the Chinese are intent on mimicking our workplace safety programs and regulations, they do seem to want to understand what we do and how we do it, with an eye to crafting a system that compliments their society.

PS: What types of information were your Chinese counterparts most interested in learning from the delegation? What types of information did they seem most eager to share?

Pam: Each of the various professional meetings was a little different in terms of the information exchange. For instance, when we met in Beijing with the State Administration for Work Safety (SAWS) the governmental agency tasked with regulating workplace safety, our hosts were more interested in telling us how well they were doing and how much improved their programs were. They did acknowledge that they still had a long way to go, but they seemed more interested in making sure we knew that they knew what they were doing.

On the other hand, the meeting with the China Academy of Safety Sciences and Technology (CASST) in Beijing, our hosts were very interested in hearing about how we certify safety professionals in this country and wanted to share how their program works.

PS: Was the delegation able to visit any locations such as Tian'an Men Square, The Forbidden City and The Great Wall? Describe those experiences.

Pam: Yes, in each city we had time for cultural visits. In Beijing, we went to dinner one evening at Qianmen Quanjude Roast Duck Restaurant, a very famous restaurant. We also went to Tian'an Men Square, The Forbidden City, and The Great Wall. Each one of those locations was amazing in its own way. Having just been in to the Palace of Versailles in Paris earlier in the year, I was struck with how alike The Forbidden City was in that it provided a means for the wealthiest rulers to live a luxurious lifestyle and escape the dreary day to day life of the peasants. Yet, both places and its inhabitants ended up with the same fate.

The Great Wall was my favorite cultural stop in Beijing. I've known about it and the incredible accomplishment it represented, but when you are actually driving along the highway or at the top of

one of the guard towers looking out, words can't describe how amazing it really is. I have to confess that I was a little disappointed in how "touristy" the portion of the Wall we visited was, there were street vendors all over the place, and all along the actual Wall, even at the top in one of the towers, three vendors had portable "kiosks" if you will.

In Shanghai we were treated the performance of the Shanghai Acrobats (Lots of oo-ing and ahh-ing in the audience that night.), as well as a visit to Shanghai General Silk Rug Factory, the Shanghai Museum, the Yu Garden, and the Old Town Market. Each place was unique in its own way, but the Old Town Market had more of a local feel, and several delegates and I feasted on a more traditional lunch while there.

PS: In Shanghai, the delegation toured a hospital construction site. Did you notice similarities and differences to a typical U.S. construction site?

Pam: It is difficult to develop a good perspective for how construction sites in China differ and are similar to those in the U.S. While our hosts were very gracious with their time, we were only permitted to view certain parts of the site, could only stay a short time in each area and we were not taken to any area where work was going on. We could hear the work being performed in the immediate vicinity but were we not able to view workers.

Even so, a couple of differences stood out; the laborers are mostly from rural villages and live with their families on the site in prefabricated two-story houses. They are also mostly illiterate and when we asked about training, we were told that most of the material that is covered involves basic safety rules, rather than highly technical information, so their safety programs are very basic as well. And the scaffold platforms are made of bamboo laced together, not wood or metal.

PS: What did the delegation do to relax and socialize (with other delegation members and with Chinese counterparts) over the 9 days in China?

Pam: Although much of our trip, including the evenings, was scripted by the local city tour guides, we had several free evenings for dinner, as well as a few free afternoons and evenings to explore the cities on our own. Because our delegation was so large, we often split into much smaller groups for meals and outings. One of the members of our delegation worked fairly frequently in both cities for his company and he and a local friend took us to a wonderful noodle house in an area of Shanghai that was not frequented by tourists. They also took us to a restaurant where we were able to enjoy hamburgers and a local rock band that covered many popular U.S. songs.

Many members of the delegation also enjoyed shopping in the Pearl Markets, the Silk Factory and in the Old Town Market. Several members of the group needed to purchase a new suitcase in order to be able to bring everything home!

PS: The delegation also visited the Bagoing Steel Plant. Describe that experience.

Pam: It's hard to describe the size of the plant, both in terms of production and the size of the plant – 25 square miles and 15,000 employees, production of 87 million tons per year by the end of 2012. The number of blast furnaces and the hugeness of the shipping and receiving deep water ports were incredible. As was the number of ships moving in and out delivering raw materials and taking product away.

While there we were able to walk the gangway above a flat roll mill and speak briefly with a Plant Superintendent and Engineer. However, similar to the construction site tour, we saw only two

employees during the entire visit; both were loading scrap into a box. And similar to the construction site, all of the employees are housed within the borders of the plant.

PS: The delegation met for 4 hours meeting with SH&E professionals from Shanghai. You've called it a highlight of the trip? Why?

Pam: While in Beijing, we attended several meetings with government and quasi-governmental agencies who are responsible for workplace safety in China. Most of the people we met with were appointed bureaucrats or political figures. Our final meeting of the trip was in Shanghai where we held a "mini-conference" with over 50 safety professionals who work in the Shanghai area. Following opening remarks by the two groups and a few presentations on general topics, we broke into four different breakout sessions (construction, manufacturing, consultants, loss control/risk management) to discuss several planned questions as well as some open discussions. Following our small group meeting, we reconvened and shared our groups' findings and key points.

The ASSE delegates worked very hard during the earlier professional meetings, but in this forum, we were able to relax and share best practices and experiences with each other and also begin to plan for how we would continue the relationships we began while there. It was a very collegial experience and there was much laughter and exchanges of business cards. Since that meeting, we have established a LinkedIn site for us to continue to share and talk about various topics. I enjoyed this part of the trip immensely because it reminded me that, regardless of where we live, and where we practice, the similarities between us are much common and more significant than the differences.

PS: Where does this experience rank among your (to date) career highlights? Explain why.

Pam: This year I was privileged to travel both to the Middle East and China for professional trips; the former to present at the Middle East ASSE Chapter's PDC and the latter to co-lead the ASSE delegation. To have had even one opportunity of this sort was amazing enough on its own, but to have had two in less than one year was beyond anything I had ever experienced before. That alone makes this year and the trip to China among the highest points in my career to date.

But, as I noted before, the chance to meet with my colleagues who work and live thousands of miles away in worlds very different from my own and to find out how very much the same we are in how we approach our professions was reinforcing and exhilarating.

PS: How did this trip affect you and your global outlook on the SH&E profession?

Pam: I have been aware of the Society's activities in the past few years that have focused on reaching out to safety professionals around the globe, not only with the development of chapters in Australia, the Middle East, Africa, and South America, but also with the formation of a Global Committee to work at broadening the relationships and solidifying the ties between U.S. and international professionals. But that knowledge was remedial and based upon what I read and heard from others. To now have had the opportunity to experience it for myself has really engaged me in a way that has motivated me to become more involved and build upon my experiences this year. I look forward to working with others at the Society level to continue to broaden and enhance the efforts made to date.

PS: How can groups such as ASSE build on the momentum of this delegation and the relationships formed during your visit to China?

Pam: As noted above, the Global Committee is one way the Society can help to foster some of the work we started while in China. The goals of the delegation and the Global Committee mirror and complement each other. The professionals that we met in China are anxious and interested to continue

the work as well; the Global Committee gives us a mechanism to bring together the various members of ASSE, regardless of where they live and work.

The safety professionals we met in China, most of whom are ASSE members, are anxious to organize themselves into a stronger working group with the help of the Society in the United States. Whether it is the development of a Chapter, bringing CSP prep courses to their area or simply providing a linkage to other professional resources, ASSE can lead the way to make those linkages happen.

Many of us in the delegation spoke of returning one day, so the final supportive measure ASSE can give is to encourage and support the formation of another delegation to travel back to China in another year or so to meet again with the same groups to talk further about ways to work together. The essential mission of this trip was to be a beginning, not an end in itself, so it's important that the Society stay on top of this effort to help it foster and grow.

PS: What would you tell a new member about getting involved in ASSE after this experience?

Pam: When an opportunity to stretch your professional wings comes along, don't hesitate to jump. I've never been to China before and I've certainly never had the privilege of taking on such an important role as co-leading a delegation like this one. But when the letter came in the mail from Chris Patton and the folks at People to People, it didn't take much for me to know that this was something I wanted to do because I had no idea when the opportunity would ever come my way again. And when Chris Patton asked me to be his co-leader, it didn't take me long to realize what an incredible opportunity was being offered to me and I didn't think twice before saying yes right on the spot. Taking advantage of opportunities like this are what define your career and your involvement in ASSE.

PS: Did you always want to be a safety professional? How or when did you know this was the field for you?

Pam: No, I didn't even know what the profession was when I began my college education. I started out as a social worker, getting Bachelor's and Master degrees in that field and working in it for about 15 years before I switched careers. And even then, I went after a degree in environmental science. When my employer at the time needed someone to help manage the safety program for the internal employees (medical surveillance and training), I agreed and, even though I wasn't sure it was something I wanted to do, I made the best of the situation and eventually realized that safety was really where I wanted to be.

I don't think I have ever had an "aha moment" when I knew that this was what I wanted to do. It has really evolved from the time when I knew I didn't want to be a social worker anymore.

PS: How did this trip to China reinforce your decision to be an SH&E professional?

Pam: My level of understanding about who we are and what we do is so much stronger now. And not just because of the people we met in China, but because of my fellow delegation members, whose depth and breadth of experiences and careers was incredible. I learned so much from each and every one of the delegates; they were truly amazing professionals that make me proud to be a part of what they do and live day in and day out. I have said several times since I returned that I now have 46 new professional friends and colleagues; each one of whom I hope to stay in touch with. Each one of them has something about their professional life to admire and learn from, both during the trip and now that we are home.

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