

What Are You Worth?

Almost 11 months ago, I was voted in as President by my colleagues. One whole year of being the person with whom the buck stops for everything affecting our membership. To say I was filled with trepidation would not be inaccurate! But, as did all presidents before me, I jumped right in and starting the juggling act of being a wife, mother, reporter, president, seminar planner, legislative watchdog, member complaint center, and public relations expert, and did so with no trouble at all. (Eyes rolled and guffaw expressed!)

Honestly, though, the last 11 months, though filled with many trials and successes and failures, have gone by so fast that it feels like I was just sworn in yesterday, even as I prepare to pass the gauntlet to the next president July 17. I have given totally of my time, energy, and talents, and hopefully they have done some good for my fellow reporters, my state, and my profession. And while I think about what I have invested of myself this past year, I can honestly state that I have received back exponentially more. I never, never anticipated the personal growth and fulfillment that I would receive from this wonderful experience.

I have given of my time that would have gone to work or family or, on the rare occasion, free time, but I have learned how to be ten times more productive than I was at this time last year. I have given of my energy but have received motivation from the leaders in our profession to accomplish so much more than I ever dreamed possible in both my personal and professional life. And I have given of my talents, whatever they were, and in return, I have learned to be a better reporter, better time manager, better political citizen, better technology adapter...shoot, just an all-around better individual. I will leave this position a much more informed, more efficient person and a far better marketer and reporter than when I entered. I now see how the little decisions I make in my day-to-day life have a greater impact upon what evolves to be the norm in my state and, hence, the nation than I ever dreamed and also how to foresee the changes that are inevitable in life and especially our technology-driven profession.

So I want to thank you all for giving me the opportunity to grow and learn and be your figurehead for the past year. I will cherish this time always. And I want to plead with you as well to please, please consider volunteering your time to this association as well. After having been a part of the board process for the past four or five years, I can see how a board culture and mind-set

develops. The only way real, progressive change happens within an association is by the infusion of new ideas and new energies and talents. Problem is, we don't have enough reporters who are willing to volunteer their ideas, energy, and talent.

This past year, we changed the bylaws to allow three more directors in hopes that we could stack the board, so to speak, with new people, new ideas, and new talent. And we have been very lucky to receive some great applicants, but we have also been disappointed that two spots remained open last year, and currently three spots are vacant as of the time of this letter. Is there no one who is able and willing to help lead and serve your fellow reporters? Is there no one with ideas and talents to offer? Are we really at the point where everyone is so apathetic about their livelihood, their profession, their ethics, and the benefits that an accurate record provides to our judicial system and, thus, our government and rights as a people that everyone is content for these things to be handled by someone -- *anyone* -- else but them? Well no wonder reporters across the nation are taking a hit from court administrators and legislators around the nation. If we don't care about the record and our profession enough to staff our associations, why should anyone else care about the record and our profession?

For many years we have been in a time of tumultuous change via technological advancements and declining budget appropriations. This is the time when we most need innovative ideas and input and grassroots efforts to educate our end users, legislators, and the public. We have provided sessions at almost every seminar on marketing yourself, your profession, your reporting value. We have asked for volunteers and input and have received barely a one. If this profession falls by the wayside, it will not be due to new technology or a better method of capturing the record, it will be due to apathy from its practitioners. The time to do something about it has been upon us for a couple of years now. Please get involved somehow, some way in advancing your profession and not just feeding at the trough.

It reminds me of an editorial I read in the newspaper one morning about a wealthy man who was asked how much he was worth. He replied \$2,000, and then explained that one was only worth as much as he gave away, as that's all that would matter when he died. So I ask you now with all respect, what are you giving of yourself? What are *you* worth?