

# ENGAGING CHANGE THROUGH COURAGE, LEADERSHIP & EXCELLENCE

Julius E. Rhodes, SPHR

**T**hese two statements identify what intuitively or, if not in actuality, we all know and that is, it is never a matter of what to do *if* change happens but what to do *when* change happens. As we look at parking as an occupation it is doubtlessly true that our industry (and the people who make up our profession) have and are changing. In the formative stages of the parking profession it is not a stretch to say that pioneers saw an opportunity and that, based upon their hard work and desire to succeed, they were able to carve out a niche for themselves. This is not unlike what it must have been like during the migration west, in the early days of our country's formation with people staking out land claims, gold mines or even wildcatting for oil.

Parking professionals are a unique group who are fiercely loyal, committed, not afraid of risk and like to work hard and play harder. If you don't believe me just talk to Michael Klein, CAPP, of the New York State Parking Association, Sue Olley, CAPP, of the Florida Parking Association, Curtis 'Butch' Lynch of the Parking Association of the Virginias. Or even Robert Horch or Cindy Campbell of the California Public Parking Association. These individuals as well as you know that parking is the window to every institution and operation imaginable. As Todd Helmer of Timothy Haahs and Associates often says, 'parking has gone from the out-house to the penthouse' and that is certainly true.

The perspective of our profession, and of us as individuals, has been elevated. Today we have the CAPP Program that has allowed over 100 people with vastly different skill sets to move the profession forward and to take those skills and layer it with a professional certification that is the equal of any certification in the world. Do parking professionals continue to work hard and strive for success? They certainly do but, today, rather than just 'falling' into the

profession, people are actually seeking out a career in parking, transportation and related industries as a viable entity for the long-term employment, growth and opportunity it possesses.

These are the best and worst of times for the parking profession. They are the best of times because of the increased attention that we are receiving. They are the worst of times because with that heightened exposure comes the realization that in order to maintain the gains we have made, we will need to make further changes to ensure our future viability and change is not easy. However, the best indicator of future behavior is past behavior and in that regard we have a distinct opportunity based upon our history to continue to make the changes needed for the health of our profession.

But the question now becomes, "What needs to happen to make this change possible?" And this is where I contend that we need to become adept at 'Engaging Change through Courage, Leadership and Excellence.' If this is our challenge, then let me take a moment to suggest how 'Parking in a Changing World' can and must 'Lead the Way'.

When we talk about engaging from a definitional standpoint, we are talking about taking on something or becoming enmeshed in something to the point that it becomes integrated within our being. Not only are these things true with regard to being engaging but, when we talk about something that is engaging, but in addition to the joy and anticipation of our association (with that entity which we find engaging), which in this case is change. Change is a compelling

force of nature and in keeping with an ancient African proverb that says, "If you wait for the sun to rise it still rises. If you don't wait for the sun to rise, it still rises." The moral is that you cannot stop change and even further, we cannot choose who to interact with, only how we will interact.

The interaction that all of us need to take is one that displays

*Change is the law of the  
land, those who look to the  
past or the present are sure  
to miss the future.*

—John F. Kennedy

*The only constant is change.*

—Heraclitus



*One thing that all of us should know is that in this world no one individual or organization will attain perfection.*

courage, leadership and excellence; and I will explain specifically what each of these means. It has been said that courage is not the absence of fear but the realization that fear exists and a desire or willingness to overcome our fears and make decisions which are difficult, or at the very least not easy, will allow us to be better tomorrow than we are today.

When we talk about fear there are two kinds: fear of the known and of the unknown. All of us have a comfort zone, which we need to have. However, what we cannot afford to do is become so comfortable with where we are that we continue to stay where we are. You never need to worry about going slow but you do need to worry when you stop progressing.

As we look at the state of our profession and the pioneers who forged the way for what we now enjoy, the reality is that many of those people will be leaving the field in the next one-to-three years. This 'brain drain' will require new leadership and astute individuals to learn from the past, understand the present, and plan for the future to make the courageous decisions that will benefit the profession and its members. Anything less may hasten the decline of the profession to a point that will negatively impact the industry - and the perceptions of its members - that many have worked so hard to uplift.

As it relates to leadership, in general there is a void of leadership from the very highest levels of corporate life, and political office,

down. But what really is leadership and why is it so critical? To answer that question, let me suggest what leadership is not. Leadership is not dependent upon a title and it has nothing to do with tenure and certainly has nothing to do with age. Leadership requires the accepting and realization that each of us has to act when action is called upon in order to make situations better - first and foremost - for others and if there is an opportunity after that, for ourselves. Leadership is something that we take individual and personal responsibility for as a way of visually communicating our desire to commit to the enterprise of which we are associated.

As it relates to our profession we cannot afford to fall into the leadership void that plagues so many other aspects of our life. The reason we cannot afford for this to happen is because although our profile has been elevated, we are still for many an unknown commodity. This can be clearly seen when you tell people that you work in the parking profession and you are greeted by quizzical stares that beg the question, "There is a parking profession?"

It is important for these people, as well as others that we may want to attract or entice into our profession, that we display leadership on a consistent basis that endears them to us and the very real opportunities that we have to present.

What does this type of leadership look like in practice? It takes many forms but leadership is most often seen by dedicated individuals who boldly and proudly proclaim their membership in the parking profession. Regardless of our role within the profession, we need to promote the profession in clear, concise and compelling terms and language. The leadership that I speak of also manifests itself by ensuring that we provide front-line staff. With the necessary tools to make people who utilize our services feel warm, welcomed and wanted. If you ever need assistance in any of these areas, please do not hesitate to contact me, as I can help.

This is not an exhaustive list but it will require each of us to find a better way everyday to exercise our mental muscles so that we constantly have an eye on improving and having that desire to get better rub off on others.

Finally there is the issue of excellence. My view of excellence is a little different than what most people might think it to mean. Excellence to me does not mean perfect or perfection. One thing that all of us should know is that in this world no one individual or organization will attain perfection. Given that change is a constant and time does not stand still for anyone or anything, I believe the commonly accepted definition of excellence is not viable or realistic.

When I talk about excellence, I mean realizing that although perfection is not attainable it should not prevent us from seeking to do all that we can to show people our desire to make ourselves, our profession and the people around us believers. Excellence represents our highest aspirations and dreams consistent with being the best.

Let me expand this idea of excellence and being the best. No one should want to pursue the notion of excellence and being the best solely as it relates to the parking profession because the parking profession, in spite of the fact that it is a multi-billion dollar industry, is still relatively small in comparison to other industries and most people are still getting used to us.

Quick, who is the best player on the Minnesota Timberwolves, the St. Louis Blues, the Detroit Lions or the Texas Rangers? I don't know the answer and perhaps none of you do either. My point is this: if we are to pursue excellence it cannot be limited to the perspective of parking only. We have to pursue excellence by being identified as



The conference provides you the opportunity to view in person and evaluate new parking technology, equipment and processes available to increase the accountability, accuracy and methods of performing parking operations throughout the industry. Attendance also gives you the chance to develop and strengthen professional partnerships, compare business procedures and applications of similar parking organizations during round table discussions to identify how it may enhance your operation.

Another value of attending is the availability of training and informational sessions. These sessions give you the opportunity to measure first hand, the qualities that determine the merit, usefulness and importance of belonging to this professional international parking organization consisting of endless information involving parking enforcement, meters and multi-space pay stations, revenue control and cash handling, parking management software and hardware, mechanical parking systems, parking facility maintenance, transportation and shuttle services and much more.

— *Allen Corry, CAPP, Parking Services Director,  
Town of Greenwich, CT*

For the several years that I've been attending the IPI's Annual Conference there has never been a time that I didn't come back to work more energized and invigorated. The conference continues to provide me an opportunity to reconnect with colleagues and build new relationships with peers, consultants and suppliers alike. At base, the networking opportunities made possible at IPI's conference remains a central reason I attend. Equally important are the educational sessions and resulting discussions that are focused on germane and timely topics. I bring my challenges to the conference and consistently return to work with solutions I can put into action immediately. Likewise, IPI conferences are held in places where innovations in parking and transportation abound. I can certainly gain by reading about these fine places but seeing them in person makes all the difference. I value opportunities to step out-

side my small world to gain perspective and the IPI conference provides countless chances to this very thing.

Whether through networking, sessions or field tours, attending the IPI Annual Conference has become a central part of my professional development. More importantly, I'm able to take information and ideas back to my employer that can be put into practice. The value proposition for attending each year is easy to justify and support.

— *Casey Jones, CAPP, Director, Parking & Transportation  
Services, University of Colorado, Boulder*

The IPI Annual Conference is a very important resource for me personally and professionally. We so often get "stuck" in our day-to-day operations and the issues of the moment, getting too close that we lose perspective and miss big picture thinking. For me, the conference provides a breath of fresh air and an injection of new thinking and approaches that I could never have on my own or with my staff. I love hearing, seeing and talking about new ideas and fresh approaches either in the exhibit hall, during a session or the all-important informal networking. There is nothing that replaces that first person, interactive experience.

In these times of financial challenges it is ever so important to prioritize everything we do to insure that we are wringing out the very best value for our city, college, university or clients. In our global and fast-changing world, it is even more important to stay in touch with the best practices and technologies that can produce the highest results and value, as well as steering clear of what has not worked. The critical mass of ideas, people and vendors combined with the quality of sessions and the sharing of ideas between highly experienced individuals, makes this conference an invaluable component to providing the very best services and products in this uncertain world. It's top on my list of value for the dollar.

— *Molly Winter, Director, City of Boulder-Downtown  
& University Hill*

one of the best companies much in the same way that Apple, General Electric and other concerns are not viewed as the best based upon the industry that they are in but based upon how they deliver their services to their constituents.

We must strive to achieve excellence for our profession and its members first so that our individual entities will benefit from our collective expertise. With regard to 'Engaging Change through Courage, Leadership and Excellence,' we can either allow things to happen to us or we can make things happen for us. We are at a critical point in our evolution and the decisions that we make today will have immediate ramifications for our future. Our future belongs to all of us and we can either pursue and prosper or react and recede... You Decide. ■

**Julius E. Rhodes**, SPHR is Founder and Principal of the mpr group, a broad-based human capital, organization effectiveness and leadership development consulting practice and author of the upcoming book – BRAND: YOU – Personal Branding for Success in Life and Business. He is also currently a Ph.D. candidate in applied ethics at Loyola University of Chicago. To see how his services can benefit your organization, contact him via at: [www.mprgroup.info](http://www.mprgroup.info), email at [jrhodes@mprgroup.info](mailto:jrhodes@mprgroup.info) or by calling him at (773) 548-8037.

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