

“Forging the Path of the Vocational Expert...Who Will Follow? Professional Growth, Continued Learning and Mentorship”

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The IARP Forensic Section members comprise a unique and diversified group of vocational experts, life care planners and vocational economists. In the 15 plus years I have been a professional in this industry, I have learned more valuable information through attending conferences, having discussions with other professionals, and weathering challenging experiences in my private practice, than I could have in any classroom. To what degree, and how, do these experiences continue to be of benefit?

While formal education provides a starting point, it has been the mentorship by other professionals and continuing education experiences that made it possible for most of us to feel confident in client consultation, research methodologies and rendering opinions in deposition and the hearing and trial courtroom settings. How often are we asked, “What percentage of your caseload comprises actual case management activities versus expert witness activities”? Depending on innumerable factors, answers vary tremendously.

With respect to Workers’ Compensation matters, as in a growing number of other locations, the State of Arizona laws do not mandate Workers’ Compensation Carriers to provide Vocational Rehabilitation. In many States, litigated matters involving injury and workforce displacement outnumber actual vocational rehabilitation and case management opportunities in the private industry. Does this infer then, that professionals in these locales have less foundation for expressing opinions related to probable vocational outcomes, than others whose caseloads comprise primarily vocational rehabilitation services?

On the flip side, is a vocational counselor, who lacks knowledge about work-life expectancy, the effects of age on earnings, applicable employment related laws in their jurisdiction, the process of direct examination versus cross examination, etcetera, prepared to step into the forensic expert arena? What other factors must be considered?

At the 2007 Forensic Conference in Las Vegas, John Berg, Carl Gann, Ann Neulicht and Robert Taylor presented results of a survey conducted in 2006 of Forensic Section and ABVE members regarding Labor Market Research. The typical respondent had more than 11 years of experience, had testified more than 50 times, held a Masters Degree, was a CRC, was a member of IARP, and was a Sole Proprietor. These are impressive statistics.

Many of us began our careers in State or Federal programs, or large private vocational rehabilitation organizations, where we were provided formal supervision and mentorship guidance. Even later in our careers, as seasoned professionals, we continue to benefit from support and professional development through IARP Membership, attending IARP Conferences and involvement with IARP Special Interest Sections.

In reality, our professional and life experiences build upon one another and change our repertoire as we pick up momentum later in our careers. Ours is an ever-evolving resume. We gain knowledge from multiple sources along the way, not only from our

mentors and past work experience, but also our professional associations, peer and literature review, professional organization volunteer projects and continuing education opportunities.

Reaching outside of the main stream of the traditional classroom setting better utilizes our skills, challenges our practicalities and enriches our practice. But why limit this to our practice? This can also be true when presenting professional continuing education information. Taking it one step further, one can propagate personal growth through sponsorship and guidance of a less seasoned professional's development.

The IARP Annual Conference, and the IARP Forensic Section Conference are excellent formats for sharing and learning and for teaching others. Of recent concern has been the slowing of membership growth for IARP. I encourage you to participate at the Conferences, and contribute by voicing ideas and methods in promoting continued growth of the IARP family, to the Section Board members.

The current Forensic Board is working on a plan to attract students and recent CORE graduates to our profession. A committee lead by John Berg plans to promote sponsorship of students to the Forensic Conference, with the goal of developing mentor relationships, internships and job opportunities. After all, most of us have benefited from these experiences ourselves, and realize how critical they are to maintaining a strong profession.

The Fall IARP Forensic Section Conference will be held October 30th through November 1st, 2008 near Fort Lauderdale, Florida and, as the 2008 Forensic Conference Chairperson I am excited to report, it is shaping up to be the best ever! The Forensic Conference theme is "Don't Get Swamped...Navigating the Forensic Waters". Not only have we received some excellent speaker proposals, this year we have an entertainment committee creatively organizing fun activities for attendees to make the most of their leisure time outside of the sessions. The resort boasts a wonderful Spa, tennis courts, golf courses and numerous restaurants sure to appease any palate. For more information about the locale, visit <http://bonaventure.hyatt.com/hyatt/hotels/>.

In the nearer future, the IARP Annual Conference and Life Care Planning Summit and Expo, titled "Leadership", will be held in Los Angeles, California May 15th through May 18th, 2008, and will have numerous sessions of interest to all IARP members, regardless of Special Interest Section affiliation. The conference brochure and details can be accessed at www.rehabpro.org. Forensic members in attendance are invited to gather for a section meeting Saturday at 5:30 p.m.

I look forward to meeting and seeing all of you at one, or both, of the upcoming conferences. I also challenge you to take part in the future of IARP by playing an active role in ensuring the continued growth and development of up and coming professionals in our industry.