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INTRODUCTION

It was one of the best business decisions I made in my long engineering career—to join my company’s Speakers Bureau. So much professional development was involved, that looking back now through an almost 50-year lens, I cannot separate that experience from what I ultimately accomplished—and how I did it.

A company friend called me at home one Saturday; in 1971, as I recall, asking me to join our company’s Speakers Bureau. After explaining what it entailed, I joined. And now, I’m here to write to you about this important professional development experience.

If your company has a Speakers Bureau, seriously consider joining it. If none exists, consider starting one. The benefits are very real for you, and for your company.

Enjoy.

~Harry T. Roman

WHAT IS A SPEAKERS BUREAU?

It's a standing cadre of employees who can be dispatched to speak on behalf of the company...a group of Company Ambassadors. These employees may be summoned from a department that coordinates the activities of the bureau—the method I remember so well.

If a company is large enough, coordinating a Speakers Bureau can be a full-time job. Organizations would call in from the outside and request a speaker; then the departmental contact(s), would link a speaker to the request. In the old days, brochures and flyers would advertise speakers' availability. Today, staff can easily advertise speaker availability via social media and webpages.

My old company was an electric and gas utility serving a huge area, about one-fourth the land area of New Jersey, employing approximately 13,000 workers. Our Speakers Bureau boasted about 500 Ambassadors/Speakers, ready to respond to invitations from all over the state.

The kinds of organizations likely to request an ambassador to speak would be:

- Civic and fraternal groups [Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, etc.]
- Business organizations [Chamber of Commerce, and other such community businesses]
- Schools [mostly middle and high schools]
- Professional organizations [IEEE, ASME, and others]
- Colleges
- Corporations
- Teacher development groups
- Educational organizations [hosting conferences/seminars]
- Governmental and municipal organizations
- School boards

Not all Company Ambassadors (Speakers) might like to address every kind of group, so they make sure the departmental coordinator(s) know which requests are ideal for them. I preferred professional organizations and educational groups of any kind—especially teacher development groups. More experienced speakers are dispatched to speaking engagements where discussions might generate controversy, or involve panel discussions about sensitive technology, or corporate project activities. If savvy enough, speakers might sometimes participate in a debate-style forum. I can tell you from firsthand experience, debates can be exciting—and a bit scary.

Along with the coordination of actual employee presentations, a centralized Speakers Bureau would fulfill other important functions:

- Spreading the word to all company representatives, concerning the latest and greatest company news, and breaking stories about high-profile events.
- Coordinate special training sessions, where new speakers could meet with experienced ones, and learn the art of public speaking—perhaps conducting videos of practice runs, as part of the training.
- Hosting an annual Speakers Bureau Day, with seminars for all Speakers/Representatives—to make sure everyone is on track, and learning new things.
- Maintain corporate and related materials for all Company Speakers to use as handouts at presentations. Today, websites also perform this kind of function.

A prime function of a centralized bureau is the continual review of topics offered to outside requestors. Senior management should, and does, review the key issues facing a company; and they make recommendations for company representatives to address these topics with the general public. Of course, senior management might address other topics as needed, and in high-level national forums; but, the important point is, they have input into what speakers will address at the state level.

During my time, our utility was interested in these topical areas:

- Why Nuclear Power
- Floating Nuclear Power Plants
- The Energy Outlook
- Energy and the Environment