

The Presidential Address

Service to Members Is Our Strategy for Success

*The Text of the Inaugural Address Delivered
At ASHRAE's Annual Meeting in San Antonio*

By James E. Hill, Ph.D.

1996-97 President

American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, Inc.

Abraham Lincoln is one of my heroes. During the greatest crisis the United States has yet faced, the American Civil War, he led with wisdom, patience and remarkable perseverance.

During the 1850's when the nation was being torn apart by the slavery issue, Lincoln was relatively unknown outside of the American West. In 1858, the newly formed Republican Party met at the state convention in Springfield, Illinois and nominated Lincoln to run against the incumbent Stephen Douglas for the U.S. Senate.

When he rose to accept the nomination, he gave one of his most eloquent speeches. In it, he said:

"A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect that it will cease to be divided."

This was the first "volley" in the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates. Lincoln lost the election, but this speech propelled him onto the national scene. He won the U.S. presidency two years later.

The first line of the "house divided" speech is not often quoted; however, it was the preamble for his main point and gives insight into how Lincoln viewed leadership.

He said, "If we could first know **where** we are and **whither** we are tending, we could better judge **what** to do and **how** to do it."

To lead ASHRAE effectively, we the Society's leaders need to know where our members are and whither they are tending. Then we can do a better job of judging what to do and how to do it. This afternoon, I would like to share my thoughts on how we can do this.

Last year I attended a seminar with (ASHRAE Executive Vice President) Frank Coda sponsored by the American Society of Association Executives

(ASAE). We learned how societies of the future will make decisions to ensure their success. The seminar leader called the process "becoming a knowledge-based organization."

I was struck by this concept. It simply means leaders shouldn't rely on beliefs and perceptions as a basis for decisions about the Society's direction. But rather, they should rely on hard data or "knowledge" about members' needs and preferences.

To get that data requires that we, the Society's leaders, have access to a continual stream of information from you, the Society's members. This information will allow us to make the best decisions possible on your behalf.

In addition, we have the responsibility to deliver a continuous stream of information back to you, and give you "knowledge" about our policy-making and direction-setting.

It's like a two-way arrow. Information traveling both ways, continuously.

About the President

ASHRAE President James E. Hill, Ph.D., is division chief of the Building Environment Division of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in Gaithersburg, Md., where he directs the NIST's applied research for building equipment, building systems and the building envelope. Hill also manages grants to the U.S. air-conditioning and refrigerating industry for NIST's Advanced Technology Program.

Hill joined ASHRAE in 1972 and has held a variety of leadership positions. He earned the Society's Distinguished Service Award in 1995, and was elevated to the grade of Fellow in 1990.

As ASHRAE president, Hill will direct the Society's Board of Directors and oversee the Executive Committee.

Hill has a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and a master's degree and doctorate in mechanical engineering from Georgia Institute of Technology. He has written more than 60 papers in the building research/solar energy area, and in 1994 was named the U.S. Department of Commerce--NIST Engineer of the Year. He also has received the Gold Medal, his department's highest award, for significant technical leadership in mechanical engineering research to improve environmental systems of buildings.

It is my goal as ASHRAE's president to get this process imbedded in our thinking, procedures, and culture.

The words of Lincoln, the thoughts from the ASAE seminar and the many discussions with my ASHRAE friends have led me to focus my theme this year on you, the ASHRAE member. Without you, there would be no ASHRAE. Only with your continued support and volunteer effort can ASHRAE continue as a vibrant, growing, successful technical society.

With this in mind, I have chosen as my theme: **Service to Members Is Our Strategy for Success.** This year, I would like the Society to accomplish three goals:

- **One** - Significantly improve the communication between our members and our leaders.

- **Two** - Enhance programs that focus on the common self-interests of our members.

- **Three** - Implement a Society-wide philosophy to retain members.

Let's look at these goals in more detail.

Goal One - Significantly improve the communication between our members and our leaders, like the two-way arrow I mentioned a few moments ago. We have made a significant start in obtaining information from our members about their wants, needs and preferences.

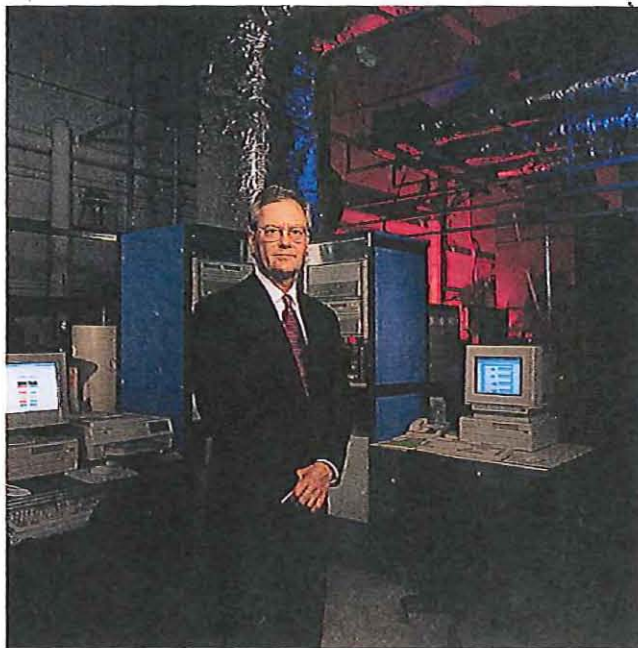
ASHRAE conducted a survey in 1993, the so-called Kerrs and Downs survey. It was sent to 5,000 individuals, mostly members. This survey was a wonderful way to start building a database of knowledge about our members. In response to that survey, we:

- Created the Chapter Program Committee;
- Formed a committee to develop the concept of an ASHRAE Training Institute;
- Are nearing completion of plans for a mentoring program;
- Scheduled a forum on the special needs of younger ASHRAE members;
- Started a formal program of recognizing employers at CRCs; and,

- Started writing applicable ASHRAE standards in code language.

While we are not ready for another Society-wide survey, I am pleased that the Long-Range Planning Committee has added funds to their 1998-99 budget for another member survey. This would establish a five-year cycle for such surveys. In the meantime, there are numerous other ways that our committees, chapters and individuals can find out about members' needs.

The Continuing Education Committee, for example, plans to survey a small segment of our membership during this coming year to find out if their current "curriculum of offerings" are sufficient.



James E. Hill, a division chief with the National Institute of Standards and Technology, is the new president of ASHRAE.

Last May at the Region X Chapter Regional Conference (CRC), I heard a report from the Southern California Chapter. This chapter significantly improved their attendance at chapter meetings this past year by surveying their members at the beginning of the year and then planning programs accordingly.

Also, four members of ASHRAE's Board of Directors and at least one staff Director attend and participate in every CRC. We hear formal motions from the chapter delegates. Many of these motions are discussed at the CRCs, but few are passed; however, they are excellent sources of members' preferences. For example, at the Region X meeting, I learned first hand

about the desires of the overseas chapters even though only one relevant motion was passed. This year, I will ask each Society vice president who files a report from the CRC to concentrate on what they heard from members.

Although we are starting to ask, we need to ask our members more questions and more often about what they want and need. We also need to give more attention to sharing information from the Society leaders to our members. I will personally use *ASHRAE Insights* to get information to you on our policy decisions, and I will work with our Board of Directors to develop other channels of communication from us to you.

Goal Two - Enhance programs that focus on the common self-interests of our members. The key words are **common** and **self-interest**.

First - Common. ASHRAE is comprised of more than 50,000 members in more than 120 countries who have voluntarily come together to meet **common** needs, solve **common** problems, and accomplish **common** goals. That, in essence, is why technical societies and associations exist.

Second - Self-interest. Most people join and stay in an organization for its personal benefits. Our mission is to advance the arts and sciences of HVAC&R for the public good. Just as important, we must provide

our members with direct personal benefits.

When George Washington was leading the Continental Army, his troops often suffered from harsh fighting and miserable living conditions. When he appealed to the Continental Congress for more resources, he was often rebuked.

In a letter he wrote the Congress in 1778, he said:

"I do not mean to exclude altogether the idea of patriotism. I know it exists, and I know it has done much in the present contest. But I will venture to assert, that a great and lasting war can never be supported on this principle alone. It must be aided by a prospect of some reward."

A large fraction of ASHRAE members will not sustain their membership to advance the arts and sciences of HVAC&R alone, they need programs that will bring them direct personal benefits. Which programs do this? The ones that provide technical information to you and enable you to perform better in your profession. These are the ASHRAE Handbook, continuing education courses, and technical information, contained in the Society's transactions and publications, which is disseminated by electronic media.

I would like to comment on two of these programs, continuing education and the ASHRAE Handbook, and on using electronic media as a method of communicating and disseminating technical information.

I'm convinced that continuing education is one of the most valuable services that we can provide to our members, new and experienced members alike. Our program, which presently consists of fundamental core courses, Professional Development Seminars, and short courses offered at Society meetings, provides the tools needed to succeed in our industry. Our fundamental core courses are set up to come to you through self-directed learning and home study. They also can be used by companies and ASHRAE chapters for classroom instruction.

The emphasis this coming year will be to complete five of the core courses covering a broad spectrum of fundamentals. I encourage our Technical Committee members to volunteer their services in the review of these materials and to work positively in the completion of these courses in a timely manner.

I believe that our continuing education program will have a lasting impact on ASHRAE and our industry. Most states are adopting recommendations of the National Council of Engineering Examiners and Surveyors for maintaining professional engineering registration. More than 15,000 ASHRAE members who are professional engineers will maintain their registration through the use of our curriculum and its courses.

Some societies are fortunate to have a "golden handcuff" — a benefit so valuable that a member would still belong even if the society terminated all other membership benefits. This benefit supports membership retention

(handcuff), because members feel they can't survive without it (the gold).

The ASHRAE Handbook is our "golden handcuff." It's often referred to as the "bible" of our industry. We must preserve its premier status to our members and our industry.

In recent years, however, ASHRAE members have increasingly expressed that the Handbook is not very useful in day-to-day applications. The material is either too general or too academic. ASHRAE members who do system design are now turning away from the Handbook as their primary guide.

I have met with the Planning Subcommittee of the Handbook Committee and asked them to focus their attention during this coming year on the quantity and quality of HVAC system design information available to our members through the Handbook. It's not going to be easy. I have empowered the Handbook Committee to take charge, but they must get excellent support and cooperation from the Society's technical committees.

Electronic media as a method of communicating and disseminating information is revolutionizing ASHRAE; for example:

- The ASHRAE Home Page now has a wealth of information about the Society. There are at least four ASHRAE chapters and four ASHRAE Student Branches that have home pages linked to the ASHRAE Home Page.

- More and more communications are taking place by e-mail.

- During this past year, one ASHRAE guideline committee prepared a draft of its guideline over the Internet without face-to-face meetings.

Dick Hayter had the "vision" to make electronic communication a focus of his Presidential year. He appointed an ad hoc committee and charged them to investigate how this media could enhance ASHRAE service to members. The committee, under the leadership of Gene Stamper, was extremely productive.

I will continue Dick's focus this coming year by appointing a follow-on committee to develop plans to implement high-priority items. I expect by the end of this Society year, we will have:

- Our 1995 and 1996 Handbooks available on CD ROM;

- Members registering for our Society meetings electronically;

- Paper submittal and review for the Journal and Transactions over the Internet; and,

- An established location on the ASHRAE Home Page for members to submit information on wants, needs and preferences.

By focusing on our common self-interests, we will be able to use our resources most effectively in providing personal benefits to the largest segment of our membership. But, there's one more thing we need to do, which brings me to my **third goal** for this year — Develop and implement a Society-wide philosophy to retain members.

Historically, we have put much more emphasis on obtaining new members than retaining existing members. ASHRAE typically retains 92% of our members yearly. While this is good, it's not good enough.

Those who have dropped out have already committed themselves to the Society once. They are already sold on the value of being an ASHRAE member. It should be much easier to keep them than to get entirely new members. We can do this by implementing strategic retention.

I remember almost four years ago when President Neil Patterson started a formal membership promotion campaign. The last two years, the Membership Promotion Committee has done well with the fall telethon to retain members. Strategic retention, however, is not just the job of the Membership Promotion Committee. It's everyone's job! It's the job of the Board of Directors, council members, committee members at the chapter, region, and Society levels, and the ASHRAE staff. It means we have to:

- Deliver the goods;
- Continually provide benefits;
- Communicate those benefits;
- Meet and exceed expectations;
- Involve members; and,
- Guarantee satisfaction.

Corporate America has discovered this and has shifted its focus from getting new customers to retaining existing customers. ASHRAE should do the same. It's good business for them, and it's good business for us.

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Part of strategic retention is to develop a customer service mentality. To illustrate the importance of this approach, I would like to share with you the results of two recent surveys conducted by the White House Office of Consumer Affairs and the Gallup Organization. These surveys found that:

1. Dissatisfied customers, on the average, tell nine other people about their bad experience;
2. Every complaint an organization receives represents an average of 26 other dissatisfied customers who don't bother to complain; and,
3. People identify courtesy, attitude, and helpfulness as the three key ingredients in "quality service."

The message here to ASHRAE's leadership, members, and staff around the world is to practice customer service techniques every day with every phone call, e-mail, and fax, and every personal contact.

New members give us a special opportunity for retention; an opportunity

for developing long-term loyalty. New members presently have the lowest retention rate. We need to give them special, personal one-on-one attention. This one-on-one contact with new members has to happen primarily in the chapters, because so few of these new members attend the Society's meetings. I recommend that chapters:

- Pair a veteran member with each new member, implement the Membership Promotion Committee's recommendation for mentoring; and,
 - Maintain personal contact throughout the new members' first year, including telephone calls from veteran members.
- This personal contact is a good opportunity to:
- Review benefits of membership;
 - Determine their unique needs;
 - Get them involved on a committee;
 - Encourage them to renew their membership at the end of their first year; and,
 - Find out what is important to them and communicate this to decision makers at all levels of the Society.

I plan to send a personally-signed letter to each new member who joins next year. In addition, when I visit chapters, I will ask for a special opportunity to speak to the new members in attendance.

During this next year, you will hear more from me about these goals and initiatives. You will hear more ideas, and you will hear how we're doing. I encourage you to let us hear from you.

In closing, I ask you to assist me in accomplishing the three goals I have established:

- Significantly improve the communication between our members and our leaders;
 - Enhance programs that focus on the common self-interest of our members; and,
 - Implement a Society-wide philosophy to retain members.
- By taking these steps and achieving these goals, we will firmly establish service to members as our strategy for success.
- In turn, I pledge to work to make us even more proud of ASHRAE in the future than we are today. ■

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