

January 2021 President's Letter

"Mann Tracht, Un Gott Lacht"

This Yiddish phrase is an old adage meaning: "Man Plans, and God Laughs." (At least it is according to the one website I checked on Google). As I look back over my term as President of the St. Louis Chapter of the Association of Corporate Counsel, I imagine that God must have been having quite a laugh last January as I carefully laid out all of the "plans" I had in store for my presidency. To briefly review:

1. Expand Employment Practice Area Networking Group through partnership with ILEA - Incomplete
2. Organize a Trial Skills/Public Speaking Program – Cancelled
3. Membership Retention and Engagement – LOL but thank God for Zoom!
4. Expand Communications Committee to help grow our social media presence – At literally the last minute in December I persuaded one member to join the Committee. So I guess I can mark that as Complete? Thanks Aaron Mutnick for helping me to achieve one goal for the year!

Of course, these were fairly modest goals to begin with. If I am being honest, armed with the knowledge that I was fortunate enough to have a dedicated and hard-working Board that already knew what they were doing, my primary goal was to just keep the train on the tracks.

Then, a pandemic hit two months into my Presidency. All of my "plans" were out the window. To push my train analogy to its breaking point, not only were there not any tracks left to keep the train on, but they weren't even allowing passengers on the train anymore! The Chapter was forced to change our entire model of how we provide value to both our membership and to our sponsors on the fly.

Despite these new and unprecedented challenges, the Board responded. In fact, not only did they respond, but they took the challenge of a virtual environment and turned it into an opportunity! Instead of focusing on all the things we couldn't do anymore, the Board was able to see various ways that we could use this Zoom reality to our advantage.

For example, new members to the Chapter typically receive a "Welcome to the Chapter" e-mail, but that's about it. It just isn't practical to have more than one annual in-person meet-and-greet dedicated to new members, given the expense, time commitment and geographical restrictions. Those same challenges don't exist in a virtual world, so our Membership Committee took the initiative to hold (multiple Zoom coffee meetings with new members and the entire Board over the course of the year.

Similarly, our Chapter has often discussed the possibility of developing a partnership with our neighbors in the Mid-America Chapter, with mixed results. However, with all of our meetings and events transitioning to virtual, it offered a unique opportunity to expand our horizons and include the perspectives from a more diverse

set of our in-house colleagues. I look forward to maintaining this productive and fruitful relationship in the years to come!

This past October, I also asked our membership to participate in one of our pro bono opportunities with Election Protection, a national network of nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations that work to protect all voters by providing information, resources and help for any issues voters may experience. Again, our membership responded and helped to ensure that voters across Missouri could have their votes counted and their voices heard. The best part – our members could do so in their pajamas from the comfort of their own home!

Finally, the murder of George Floyd rocked the very foundations of this country and caused us all to evaluate our responsibility to address systemic racism. Following the commitment from both ACC National and the ACC Foundation to move beyond words and take action in the face of social injustice and racial inequality, I sent out a message to our membership on how we as in-house counsel could address this issue. I also solicited volunteers to take on a more active role as part of the Chapter's efforts in this area, noting that we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to promote racial understanding and diversity as leaders within our respective organizations. And again, our membership answered that call, and the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force was born. The first event organized by the Task Force was *8 minutes that Changed the World: How I Can't Breathe is encouraging conversations in the workplace*. I'll always remember this program as the signature event for the Chapter in 2020, as we were able to host more than 100 members virtually, including our first ever partnership with the Mid-America chapter, and were also fortunate enough to include as an attendee Veta Richardson, President of the Association of Corporate Counsel. The Task Force followed that program up with a series of Book Club events that similarly challenged our members to be introspective while also sharing their insights and experiences as part of a productive dialogue.

The opportunity to lead this Chapter during such a unique and challenging year has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. Thank you so much to the Board and the Chapter membership for repeatedly answering the call and reinforcing to me on an almost daily basis how obstacles can be turned into opportunities. This year has reinforced the reality that our best-laid plans in life can be upended by unexpected changes, but it is up to us as to whether those changes will be disappointing or exhilarating. I'm a planner at heart, so I don't think I'll be able to go cold-turkey in (over) scheduling my days with plans and checklists. But after this experience, I am optimistic that the next time my goals have to be abandoned and I get the sense that a higher power is again enjoying any short-term failures at my expense, I will be better equipped to see the opportunities prompted by this change of plans and I can at least be in on the joke!

Best regards,

Brian Parsons

