Volunteerism
Alive and well at STLE
Our members embrace the age-old rule: The more you give, the more you get back.

IN MY FIRST TLT COLUMN, I spoke about the path that led me to becoming president of STLE.

My journey started with a simple act of volunteerism at my Houston Section—I helped run our golf tournament. That was a good experience, and I went on to run our section’s lube school and moved through the seats on the executive committee, becoming chair in 1999.

A few years later, I served two terms on the STLE board of directors as a regional vice president. I then chaired our Membership Committee, and a few years ago began the ascent through the STLE Executive Committee, serving as treasurer, secretary, vice president and now president.

Now here’s the funny part. When the Houston Section’s leaders first asked me to volunteer all those years ago, I said no. At the time, I just had too much on my plate. They then politely but firmly asked me to give it a little more thought. In essence they said, “Look, Rob, this society thing is a two-way street. You get something, but you need to give something back, too.”

From an association perspective, were wiser words ever spoken? Volunteerism is the very heart and soul of any trade association or professional society. Some experts say an association is the only organization where, when you join, you simultaneously become the customer, employee and boss.

I couldn’t help thinking about the spirit of volunteerism when I heard about the results of a recent STLE member-satisfaction survey our newest staffer, Tom Heidrich, conducted this summer. The survey was sent electronically to a group of about 700 STLE members, and we’ll be repeating it throughout the year, expanding into different demographic areas.

As almost an afterthought, we asked our members if they would be interested in volunteering for a role with the society. We were a little surprised but certainly pleased when 14 percent of the respondents answered in the positive. What’s more, half of them were new members, having joined in the last five to six months.

Tom followed up with personal phone calls to these members. What did they want to do? Almost everything, it turns out. They were interested in serving on a committee, speaking at a local section meeting, writing for one of our technical e-newsletters, reviewing papers for our journal, presenting at a Webinar—the list goes on.

As president, this was very heartening to me. It’s no secret that many professionals who follow association trends say the spirit of volunteerism, if not dying, is at least on the injury report. Volunteerism, they say, is the most recent victim of people’s busy schedules, the recession and life in the Digital Age.

I’m happy that STLE members are bucking this trend, because there’s just no substitute for the volunteer experience. In addition to giving back to an industry that’s been good for you, you’ll receive complimentary leadership training, network with an amazing group of thought leaders and contribute first hand to our industry’s body of knowledge. You’ll hear viewpoints and perspectives you might never have come across on your own. You’ll receive industry recognition and have a very positive credential to add to your resume.

Does volunteering take time? Sure. But I’m happy to report that the lesson my Houston Section leaders imparted to me way back then is 100 percent true. Yes, I’ve given a lot of my time to STLE, but I can honestly say I’ve gotten back more than I put in.

So I encourage you to think about volunteering for STLE, at either the local or national level. We definitely want you. If you’re interested, email Tom at theidrich@stle.org.

Good luck. I’ll look forward to working with you on STLE’s next big industry project.

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