

It Is as Blessed To Receive as It Is To Send

Horace S. Tyler

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Abstract

Although I was delighted and elated to receive Larry Quinn's phone message that I had been accorded this honor, I also soon faced the reality that I would have to say something significant in response.

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Address

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Horace S. Tyler

Although I was delighted and elated to receive Larry Quinn's phone message that I had been accorded this honor, I also soon faced the reality that I would have to say something significant in response.

This is a heavy responsibility. My older brother suggested that I write my speech on the back of an envelope. My wife suggested beginning with "four score and seven years ago. . ." and our youngest son suggested "just begin by thanking God, mother and country."

This third suggestion seemed to offer the most practical beginning. Acknowledging God and motherhood for their part in my genesis was quickly and easily accomplished. Expressing gratitude to my country (ACE) is what I'm trying to do here tonight.

I know this will sound trite. But I am both exhilarated and humbled by this award. Exhilarated to be considered among the company of truly great communicators who have received this award previously; humble because I know there are many others I could name off the top of my head who are more qualified than I to receive this honor.

The 1985 ACE Professional Award was presented to Horace S. Tyler at the National ACE Conference in Fairbanks, Alaska, in June. Tyler is assistant to the dean of agriculture at Purdue University. These are his remarks in acceptance of the award.

Truthfully, every idea or practice alleged to my credit has been borrowed or adapted from colleagues and ACE (AAACE) members. I think this is why I have valued every opportunity to attend and take part in regional and national meetings over the years.

I also owe much to Purdue University administration for giving me opportunities and encouragement to develop skills and to carry out programs in agricultural communication. In addition, Indiana's agricultural community has supported and received my efforts in a most gratifying way.

I also must thank Jon Smith for nominating me for this honor. His persuasive presentation of my qualifications for this award gives me something to live up to.

I feel that I gained much from being acquainted with or from having worked with previous Professional Award winners. All of them possessed and displayed qualities worth emulating. All of them have made profound statements at one time or another that have influenced my thinking or behavior. I do not have time to attribute all of the gifts that I have received from each of them, but I must mention some and hope that those not quoted will not feel slighted.

First, I have to steal from Bob Kern's address last year. He acknowledged that, "If there was merit in his professional work in agricultural communication, it was because 'the good guys made me do it.'" I echo this declaration. And I have always envied Kern's literate and articulate propensities.

The redoubtable Ralph Reeder strongly influenced my career at Purdue. He was my boss, hero and idol for 17 years as our department head. He always gave me enough rope to hang myself, but he never sprung the trap door. Reeder never shrank from confrontation. He called a spade a spade. He knew that meaning is in people, not in words.

Recently, in his sage and pithy remarks, he referred to the expected arrival of Halley's Comet—an event that usually occurs once in a person's lifetime—that ACE, like Halley's Comet, is star-crossed. We had our shining moments with NPAC. Will these moments recur? Or will we become a black hole in the universe? It's a remark to ponder.

I was always a little intimidated by Hadley Read's incisive wit and acumen. But his leadership at Illinois and in ACE was powerful, and he affected my development somehow. . .if only by his personal electricity.

I have always appreciated Harold Swanson's orderly approach to communications, especially in the field of teaching

communications principles to adult educators.

A few years ago he assembled principles of learning into a publication for adult educators. He didn't conceive or develop those principles, but he had the wisdom to search for and to recognize these principles in the disciplines of sociology, psychology, education, and communications. His work represented orderly information seeking behavior.

Swanson's purpose was service. He identified and defined his audience. He knew from experience that most adult educators like to do their work effectively and efficiently. This helped him to "walk in their moccasins" as he organized and selected the principles he presented in his publication. My point in this is that Swanson felt responsible for educating himself so that he could help others.

I have long admired and respected Mason Miller for his communications research. He is truly a product of AAACE's shining hours during NPAC. His Research Information Letter and his Research Information Abstracts—produced during his USDA years—and his Action Abstracts—produced at Michigan State—represented outstanding professional service to ag communicators everywhere.

I gained something from Jon Greeneisen, too. At a regional AAACE meeting in Chicago in 1977, the topic was public relations. There was some question as to whether we were engaged in PR or information work. Jon adroitly averted a nonproductive argument by suggesting, "... share your ideas for information and PR with your administrator. Sometimes PR creates events where information can be disseminated."

He added, "The information and PR argument reminds me of instruction given to Marine recruits at completion of boot camp: 'If you find yourself in a situation not covered by regulations, improvise action and execute smartly.'" Good thinking; good advice.

I learned something from Hal Taylor, too. In a recreational poker game at Gull Lake, Michigan, he taught me that occasionally one could draw to an inside straight.

The things I have learned from those folks and others—about both ends of Berlo's communication model—sending and receiving—have led to changes in my work at Purdue. I'll mention them briefly because I'm doing work I didn't plan on a few years ago.

In 1977, Dick Kohls, dean of agriculture at Purdue, asked me to head up a PR and information program to help non-

farm audiences to become more aware of and more knowledgeable about farm and food issues. For want of a better name we called it the Citizens' Information Program.

We settled on three main thrusts for the program. The first two you can guess—press and broadcast releases about relation of farm product prices and retail food prices, capital investments in agriculture, importance of farm exports in our economy, impact of inflation on food processing costs, etc.

Second, we devised ways to help educate news media reporters and program directors.

But the third thrust was in a new direction—how to develop leadership and initiative in farm and agribusiness people to do their own PR and information work.

The avenue for information leadership development turned out to be National Agriculture Day. This was spawned by NAMA, and had a foothold in Indiana with backing from the Lt. Governor's office.

I was invited to work with the Indiana Agriculture Day committee. The opportunity soon was presented to suggest that one way to broaden the state committee's outreach was to enlist or encourage formation of county Ag Day committees.

Somehow, the teachable moment was at hand. Farm and agribusiness folks were ready to plan and carry out county Ag Day events and activities that would tell the story of agriculture—as they see it—to nonfarm audiences.

It didn't take long for farm folks to discover that they could set up educational exhibits in shopping malls, serve 35-cent farm-cost breakfasts, persuade editors and broadcasters to publish special editions, distribute coloring books, and engage in a wide variety of PR and informational activities . . . and have fun doing it.

So, that's what I've been doing lately—playing godfather and mother superior to county Ag Day committees. And it's a lot of fun. I write newsletters to the county committees, hold a communications workshop now and then, lead cheers and take satisfaction in seeing farm and agribusiness folks gain skill and confidence in communicating on their own behalf.

A second fork in my career path occurred when I was asked by Dean Bernie Liska two years ago to help write a proposal to Lilly Endowment, Inc., to fund an agricultural leadership program. The money came through. It's administered by the Indiana Institute of Agriculture, Food & Nutrition, Inc., and they pick up half of my salary.

Some of you are familiar with the Agricultural Leadership Programs funded by Kellogg in about 20 states. Indiana's is very similar. I serve as program coordinator. It's stimulating and exciting to be working with 30 young agriculturists—ages 25-42, 26 men and 4 women. . .19 farm operators, 10 agribusiness executives and one Farm Bureau staff member.

It's a two-year program. Our first class is in its second year. We've had 11 seminars to date, including a week in Washington, D.C., last November. And we're going to take a 12-day study tour of Mexico in July.

Looking back on the turns my career has taken, I guess I can conclude that it is just as blessed to be a receiver as it is to be a sender. Both sides of Berlo's communication model are worthy and profitable roles; they are mutually dependent on each other.

I hope that ACE's professional communicators will always remain flexible, seeking and absorbing the information or training that serves our needs and the needs of those we serve.

There is no guarantee that any one training session or information-seeking foray will bring about significant results immediately.

Professional growth is not accomplished overnight. It is built over years of careful selective exposure to messages, selective perception of messages that will be most meaningful, and selective retention of information. And, if you're lucky, you may be able to recall some of that information when you need it.

Where do I see agricultural communicators heading from here?

Larry Quinn, in his article in the latest *ACE Quarterly*, says we're on the cutting edge of technology. But it's not the first time. He helps me make my point: we are still in the message business. We still need to know our audiences, what they want to know. . .and we need to be far enough out in front to supply those information needs.

Larry praises the electronic mail capabilities of his computers. He finds this most useful for keeping in touch with similarly wired correspondents in 50 states. But now, he mourns, someone obtained his electronic address and he receives unwanted, electronic junk mail. . .and he can get it quicker than ever.

He points out the one thing our new communications technologies can assure us—we can fail in our communications efforts much faster than before. If we're not careful, we will simply accelerate the speed of poor messages. Not only that, we will offend more receivers in the process because many of these new technologies offer greatly expanded audiences.

We know that communications technology is important to us and to our jobs, now and in the future. But it's not much different than railroads, telephone systems, truck lines or airlines. The pilots, drivers, dispatchers and systems operators are vital to the operations of our various communications systems. The freight they move, the thoughts conveyed, and who benefits from the delivery are still the reason for the delivery system. I hope we in ACE and agricultural communications in general don't forget that.

I've said how blessed it is to be a receiver as well as a sender, so I've come up with a few be-attitudes:

- Be—open to other people's ideas and practices
- Be—nimble in trying new ideas that might work for you
- Be—sure to give credit to people whose ideas you adopt—even if they don't work
- Be—angry, if necessary, but keep your mouth shut until you're cool
- Be—cool
- Be—patient while you're seeking the right idea
- Be—pleasantly surprised if the right idea comes along when you least expect it.

Now it's time to say again how much my family and Purdue and I appreciate this honor from an organization whose members I respect and admire—ACE.