

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Communication—A Vision or a Service of AMCA?¹

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In my presidential acceptance speech at last year's AMCA business meeting in Florida, I thanked you, the members of this association, for giving me a "golden opportunity" to pay back AMCA for all that it has provided over the professional years of my life. Now, one year later, having served as your President, I wonder just how much of the debt which I owe to you and AMCA that I have *really* "paid off." I can relate totally to an observation regarding the feelings of outgoing AMCA presidents made by Dick Peters (1976) during his keynote address at the 1976 AMCA meetings in Boston. I *have* "performed (my) function (as your President) to the best of (my) ability"; but, as Dick so aptly put it, "deep down inside (I *am*) leaving office with only a limited sense of accomplishment."

In preparing for this day and this time on the program I (probably like every other AMCA President who preceded me), thought first I would just review what was accomplished during my year as President, make a few challenges for you and future AMCA Presidents to worry about, thank you all for your support and confidence that you invested in me, accept your applause and then sit down. But probably like every other President who preceded me, I quickly realized there was very *little* (if anything), of that which *was* accomplished during the past year for which I could take full credit. Most of the issues and activities addressed and/or accomplished during my Presidency were advanced as ideas or initiated as activities long before I took office and involved the time and efforts of a multitude of past presidents, regional directors, committee chairpersons and, above all, committee members, all of whom deserve their fair share of credit for any advancements made in the Association over the past year. Acknowledging all those people would take the rest of the time allotted to me to speak. In addition, "accomplishment" is a matter of opinion; and I feel that you as members of AMCA are actually the ones who should judge what was accomplished without benefit of me biasing your opinion.

I thus turned my attention to possibly pointing out some major *new* problems in the

Association, which I feel are worthy of your consideration and appropriate action. As late as 2 weeks ago, I had settled on a theme revolving around a need for *change* within the AMCA and the way it conducts its affairs so that the Association and its members would be in a better position to meet the challenges of the future. In fact, I even had picked out Bobby Dylan's old song of the turbulent sixties, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, to serve as my theme song.

When I informed Tommy Mulhern of what I was going to talk about, Tommy, a person most knowledgeable in the history of the growth, development and direction of AMCA, decided to give me a quick education. My mailbox suddenly was overloaded with copies of past presidential addresses, editorials from *Mosquito News*, other journals and magazines, and, of course, "missiles" from the hand and mind of T. D. Mulhern. Ladies and gentlemen, the combined mass of literature that Tommy sent me took me back through time and the problems faced by the Association to "Day One" literally! I mean, we went back to the *grandparent* of AMCA, the American Mosquito Extermination Society, which was formed in 1903, to start my educational process about the changes that the association has had to face and make over the years.

As I read through this mass of literature, going from the American Mosquito Extermination Society, through the era of the Eastern Association of Mosquito Control Workers to AMCA and past, present and future, the words from another song began to ring in my head: "... the more things change, the more they stay the same." What, I feel Tommy was telling me subtly was ... "*Hey!* the Association has been effectively dealing with the need for change to meet change from its conception, so what's so new about *that* as far as problems go, Mr. President?" And if that was what he was trying to tell me, he is correct. Even if this wasn't what Tommy was trying to communicate to me, it still is true.

From almost the day that the "New Jersey Mosquito Fighters" got together in 1903 and formed the "grandfather association" which was to eventually lead to AMCA, people choosing to communicate about mosquitoes through the auspices of an association have had to deal with all kinds of changes, internal as well as external. The various names that were cho-

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sen to denote the associations formed in the interest of promoting a better understanding of mosquitoes and their control, in themselves, represent some of the major changes in platitudes and attitudes that people choosing to belong to these associations had to go through—"the *New Jersey Mosquito Extermination Association*," "The *Eastern Association of Mosquito Control Workers*," "the *American Mosquito Control Association*." In a short 80 years, the association has grown from one tuned to addressing local problems regarding mosquitoes, through one tuned to regional problems, to one now, which is certainly *national* in its scope and is primed and ready to broaden that scope even further into the international scene. Yes, the Association has even had to change its *name* to communicate its nature to the public; and it may have to do so again in the future.

Aside from the changes that the Association has had to make in its geographical scope, it has also had to broaden its scope with regard to the professional interests and problems it addresses. As noted by Bailey Pepper in *Mosquito News* in 1946, certain of the existing local mosquito control agencies had to anguish through a period of expanding their operations to deal with other insects of health importance. Coincidentally, the Association had to anguish through a period of changing its scope of interest to answer to the informational and professional needs of its members predicated by the program responsibility changes that were occurring at the local level (Hess 1959). Out of this anguish came the addition of such phrases as . . . "and related subjects, and related work," to the preamble of the Association's bylaws and to the stated objectives of the Association, which are printed on the back cover of each issue of *Mosquito News*. Changes occurring in the problems and insects being addressed by the research-oriented members of AMCA also lent themselves to giving cause for the Association to expand its scope of professional interest and activities. Changes in the scope of responsibilities and professional interests of our members are continuing to occur and eventually more changes in the scope of the Association will probably be in order to answer the needs of our members.

Of course, there have been innumerable changes in the approaches and technology used to control mosquitoes and other arthropods of public health importance; similarly, there have been changes in public attitude toward these approaches and technologies over the years of the Association's existence. Again, the Association has had to deal with these changes and it will continue to deal with such changes in the future.

"The Times, They Are A-Changin,'" Bobby Dylan? They were when you wrote that song and they still *are* a-changin', that which changes may be new; *but*, change itself is old . . . it's a way of life on this planet. What an Association like AMCA needs to do is be ready for change; better yet, AMCA should strive to place itself into a position and have the wherewithal to *manage* change to the best interests of its members and the variety of professional scopes they represent.

To paraphrase some recent remarks made by the Director of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Neville P. Clarke, to those of us employed by that agency. . . . any organization that is going to stay alive and prosper in this age of megacommunication and corresponding megachange is going to have to become better managers of change. The organizations that do "stay alive" and continue to grow are going to have to be more *proactive* rather than *reactive* to change. In this regard, *proaction* dictates that the organization anticipates changes before they occur. In certain instances, the proactive organization may have to actually *create* change or, at least, develop possibilities for changes to occur. In other instances the organization will have to identify and effect alternatives to changes that are perceived as coming.

Proaction is a *must* for AMCA as far as I am concerned; we must not slip into a situation of being reactive. Reaction will result in keeping ourselves in recent history rather than creating history; we will constantly be playing catch up and fighting brush fires will be a way of life. I think AMCA has a history of being a *proactive* organization and I would like to see it continue to be that way.

To you as members of this fine organization I say, be proud and knowledgeable of AMCA's history and learn from it, but, don't *stay* in it! Time and events go on and so must we. To quote John Naisbitt, a social forecaster, who was recently interviewed by Association Management's *Leadership* magazine, "If associations hold on to what they've been doing in the past because that is what worked, they are absolutely (going to go) out of business!" I don't want to see that happen to AMCA, I know you don't want to see it happen either and I don't think it will happen, if you and I continue to follow the example of our professional forefathers and remain proactive to change.

The steps that we must take to remain proactive are basically the ones that have been followed for the most part by AMCA in the past, i.e.:

1. Assess current situations.
2. Identify what changes are needed (or forthcoming).

3. Determine how a given change can best be dealt with or achieved
4. Develop a *plan* to achieve the objective
5. Implement the plan

These steps are most effectively accomplished when the problem (or change) and its solution are perceived and formulated at the grass roots level of the organization. Thus, you, the members of AMCA, lie at the base of AMCA continuing to be proactive to change.

And what continues to be the "tie that binds us all together" in our struggle to deal with change? . . . a word that I have alluded to already several times in this address: *communication*. During the course of reviewing the historical literature that Tommy sent me, I looked up the definition of an "Association." According to Webster's dictionary, an "association" is "an organization of persons having a common interest." Then, of course, reading through the historical development of AMCA, I became aware of just how diverse the association and its membership have become, so in the face of this diversity of interests, what's the *common* interest that holds this organization together . . . mosquitoes and their control? I think not! Certainly, mosquitoes and their control remain a center stage in the nature of the information and activities involving AMCA, but then phrases like "other vectors," "other subject matter" and "related work" have crept into the documents describing the exact nature of our organization. No, ladies and gentlemen, I don't believe that the mosquito theme keeps us together as a common interest, it is *communication* about mosquitoes and everything else we find ourselves involved with professionally that keeps us together as an association. Communication was certainly what kept the Association alive and together during previous periods of change in the Association's geographic scope and scope of professional interests and needs; and communication is what will keep us alive as we relate to future changes.

And, so, what is "communication?" Again according to Webster "to communicate" as a verb means: to share; to convey knowledge of or information about; to make known; to reveal by clear signs; to cause to pass from one to another; to transmit information, thought or feeling so that it is satisfactorily received or (and) understood. The need to communicate about mosquitoes and their control is what brought the New Jersey Mosquito Fighters together in 1903; and it remains as the glue that keeps us together now. It also is the primary service provided by the Association today.

The source or cause for future change in AMCA will not be in the need to communicate,

change will come as a result of what we will need to communicate about, who we will need to communicate with and how we will go about communicating.

The challenge or vision (to coin a term used by John Naisbitt, in *Leadership* magazine, 1983) that I feel AMCA needs to subscribe to is: continue to develop and use the most effective and (in this day and age of massive information output and rapid communication) the most efficient mechanisms for communicating between ourselves and with others outside the Association. In this regard, each activity or issue taken on by the Association should constantly be assessed as to *what* we want to communicate; *whom* we want to communicate it to and *how* can we most effectively and efficiently communicate what we want to have understood to those with whom we are trying to communicate.

During this assessment-reassessment process regarding communications in and by AMCA, I would like to see us continue to deal effectively with such anguishing issues as: what is communicated by the very name of our Association; what is communicated by our bylaws, policy statements and resolutions; what is being communicated by the titles and content of our various journals, bulletins, and other publications; what do our meetings communicate . . . and is our central office adequately staffed, equipped and funded to effect and manage the type of communication that is needed by the association, etc? If any of the information passed through one of our current mechanisms for communicating requires further explanation before those, whom we want to understand, will, indeed, understand; then, my friends, I feel that the mechanism is in need of some change or modification.

Development and maintenance of effective, efficient mechanisms (or lines) of communication is, I believe, the vision or major charge of an association like AMCA, and the use of these mechanisms of communication to deal with changes that affect the professional interests of the membership is the *service* that is provided by the Association. Either way, *Communication* is why we *are* and why we are here today.

Again, thank you for giving me the honor and opportunity to serve as your President. It has been a learning experience, one that I can fall back on in the years to come as I continue to try to pay back the debt to AMCA for all that it has provided me and done for me as a professional.

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