



NETWORKING ANOTHER LEARNING TOOL

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The word networking means various things to different people. No matter what your definition may be, networking has always been, and will always be an extremely valuable way for water and wastewater operators to interact, increase their knowledge, and answer questions that will benefit the system they operate.

If you didn't know, I'm sort of "old school". I view networking as the interaction between operators, assistance providers, health department officials, and vendors in a face to face arena, such as during a break or lunch at a classroom training session. While the training session itself usually provides much needed information, these break periods allow us all the opportunity to share questions and solutions, leaving each of us more educated, and therefore more valuable to our employers.

I recently returned from a conference in New Orleans where I had an opportunity to network with many other training providers from around the country. Over the past few years, I have met and become friends with many of the training providers from other state rural water associations, and I value the time we make to discuss training tips and techniques – what ideas have worked and the ones that have failed. I also value the time that I can talk with operators, either at training sessions or during a regular visit. The many ideas you share with our staff are invaluable, and eventually are passed along in order to provide the highest quality of assistance to your fellow operators. Most operators are aware of just how important this interaction can be. However, there are many new people entering the field, and I think it is important that we all reach out to these new operators and help them out in any way we can. If you are a new operator, please ask your questions. Remember, the only stupid question is the one that is never asked. I have found most operators from around the state to be very friendly and always willing to lend advice or assistance when needed. As always, don't forget that you can always reach out to the regulatory agencies for assistance as well. One other option that I feel is not used often enough is to reach out to the vendors from whom you purchase your materials and equipment. These folks are extremely knowledgeable in regards to their products and are usually only a phone call away.

Now, to many other people, networking refers to concepts of

recent technology, such as the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, and things like that. I'm the first to admit that I am not the most savvy person as it relates to these ways to communicate. As a matter of fact, my wife likes to tell people that I'm a "Neanderthal" when it comes to technology. She prays every night that I will stand upright and stop dragging my knuckles someday. Now there is a woman who has gotten used to disappointment! All joking aside, I have made a commitment to become more "fluent" in these new technologies, solely for the purpose of being able to provide better service and become a better employee. Operators are always looking for better and easier ways to meet the ever increasing demands placed on them, and these means are just another way to save time and money.

Here at the NYRWA, we strive to keep up-to-date and provide the best services possible. With a great deal of hard work, our Assistant Director, Tim Shudt has updated our website and created an item called the Forum. On the Forum, operators and any other member can interact at any time, day or night, and hopefully have another place to seek answers to their questions. I personally am much more suited for a stone tablet and chisel than a computer, but even I have found the new website, and especially the Forum, very easy to access and use. Any question can be posted on the Forum and answers or suggestions will stream in from our staff as well as your fellow operators. The Forum can be accessed on our website at www.nyruralwater.org then click Forum. The NYRWA is also now available on Facebook. I hope you all have a chance to check it out.

So, no matter what your definition of networking may be, I hope you all use whatever means possible to interact with your peers, ask your questions, and provide any help you can to ensure our operators are as prepared as possible for the demands of the job. The staff here at the NYRWA are always available to provide whatever assistance we can, and if we don't have an answer, I'm sure we can reach out to our good friends and colleagues for a timely response.

Uh oh, my wife is praying again. Finally, a prayer I can answer... she wants the living room painted. Have a happy and healthy Fall everyone! 💧💧💧