

5 Reasons to Join Your Professional Organization

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania... Standing at the Philadelphia Convention Center near the Redding Square Terminal, there were science teachers as far as the eye could see! The group was energized as people moved between sessions and sites. The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) Annual Conference on Science Education was underway... (www.nsta.org)

Technically the conference begins on Thursday, but in reality more and more people are using the days before the conference for additional professional development opportunities. Many different organizations offer professional development institutes the Wednesday before the conference, and the days preceding these institutes are filled with meetings for many educators.

As a board member of two national organizations, the National Science Education Leadership Association and the Association of Science Materials Centers, one question we continually ask at these meetings is “What do our members get in return for their membership?” This can be a difficult question, as there are many reasons any individual belongs to an organization. However, I recently read an article by Christine Royce that discusses 5 reasons for belonging to professional organizations. With her permission, I have translated her 5 Reasons as they connect to the Alaska Science Teacher’s Association.

Professional Organizations and You!: A Winning Combination

By Christine Anne Royce, NSTA Professional Development Division Director

Nearly ten years ago, a colleague and I authored an article for *Science Scope* entitled “Forces at Work: The Top Five Reasons for Belonging to a Professional Organization.” I recently revisited this article in a discussion with a colleague about being professionally active and involved and thought it would be worthwhile to look at how science educators could become involved their local organization.

When the article was published, there were as the title states: 5 reasons provided for belonging to a professional organization. Below is a summary of those reasons, as well as how ASTA can continue to provide opportunities to their members.

Reason #1: “It places you on the “information highway” – “Professional organizations offer their members many opportunities to be placed in the mainstream of information exchanges. (Royce & Hechtman, p. 29, 2001)

How can you share your expertise with the Alaska Science Teachers Association? What are the funding sources that would help you get to the state Math and Science Conferences? How do you share ideas with other science education professionals?

*Have you opened up the latest issue of **Science Bytes** to check out the **dozens** of opportunities for teachers in science and related fields? **Bytes** is an amazing collection of information of use to science educators from K – 12... Which opportunity is a good fit for you? If you are not already on the list to receive **Science Bytes** contact ASTA President Judy Onslow at onslow_judy@asdk12.org*

Check out NSTA, as they provide listservs and blogs for their members, and offers to all parties interested in science education the opportunity to subscribe to NSTA Express, which is a weekly e-newsletter. There are other monthly e-newsletters available at <http://www.nsta.org/publications/enewsletters.aspx>.

Taking a few moments either weekly or monthly to update yourself on current topics and upcoming events in our field is one of the best possible reasons to belong to our professional organization as it keeps us current!

Reason #2: “You can expand your horizons through conference opportunities” – “As a member of a professional organization, you are made aware of upcoming conferences and conventions....[and] you can find just about any subject-related topic of interest at a convention.” (Royce & Hechtman, p. 29, 2001)

*Conference and academy opportunities abound! Keep your eyes on the Alaska Science Teachers Association (ASTA) newsletter, the **ASTA** website <http://www.aksta.org/> and be sure you are on the list for **Science Bytes** so you can read about resources and opportunities for Science Educators K – 12. If you want to be on the list for **Science Bytes**, contact onslow_judy@asdk12.org*

Reason #3: “You can read all about it” – “Every professional organization provides some type of publication for its members... and provides an avenue for the exchange of new information.” (Royce & Hechtman, p. 30, 2001)

ASTA provides an electronic newsletter and an active website that link you to other professionals, opportunities for teachers as well as students, connects you to standards of practice, and in general help keep you in the loop!

Reason #4: “All the world is a stage” – “In addition to increasing your knowledge and strategies at conferences, you have the chance to reciprocate and share your own ideas by presenting a session or workshop yourself.” (Royce & Hechtman, p. 30, 2001)

If you have ever attended a conference or institute, you know there are many different presenters needed to organize and offer such events. Well, you could be one of those presenters. Go ahead! Submit a proposal for an upcoming conference or institute! What ideas can you share with your colleagues at the next State Math/Science Conference in 2011?

Reason #5: "It challenges you"- "Every organization has some type of board of directors or advisory committee that needs volunteers to become involved in some aspect of the group's mission." (Royce & Hechtman, p. 31, 2001)

Last but not least, you have been a member, seen the benefits, and want to take the next step. Well you should! Get involved, submit your name to serve on a committee. ASTA can use a strong foundation of educators to ensure our colleagues from around the state have the opportunity to offer the best science education possible to the students in Alaska.

Regardless of which reason you select to become involved with a professional organization –it is a worthwhile investment of your time, energy, and membership dues. It will serve you well in many ways – both professionally and personally.

Royce, C. A., & Hechtman, J. (2001). Forces at work: The top five reasons for belonging to a professional organization. *Science Scope* 24(6), 28-31.

As for me, Trisha, an Alaskan Science Educator, Reason #6 for being a member of ASTA is to qualify for the mini-grants for Classroom Projects or for Professional Development Travel. Thanks to ASTA for the Professional Development Grant that helped support my trip to the National Science Teachers' Association Annual Conference on Science Education in Philadelphia this last March!

Submitted by Trisha Herminghaus 4/22/10