



NEWS & Notes

The Newsletter of the International Society for Performance Improvement

Nov/Dec 2001

ISPI's International Voice Is Growing Stronger

by Carol M. Panza, ISPI Director

ISPI stands for the INTERNATIONAL Society for Performance Improvement. I won't go through the history lesson of the evolution of names for the Society, except to say that the decision was made in 1995 to change our name from the National Society for Performance and Instruction (NSPI) to the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI). The name change effectively emphasized performance improvement instead of any individual solution, despite the value of that solution. We also recognized that the technology that brings us all together is borderless and is not hindered by cultural differences or nuances, in its potential application. The Society (including chapters) currently has an average membership of 10,000 that consists of approximately 850 members who live and work in 46 countries outside of the USA. As we continue to grow a diverse and multinational membership, we must also focus on ways that all members including those who do not live in the USA, can have opportunities for active participation in ISPI and its chapters.



Chapter of ISPI was born. A portion of the Chapter Leadership Workshop was used by this group to make an initial draft of a vision and mission for the proposed chapter and to plan for a forming meeting to which all interested professionals would



be invited (whether or not they belonged to a chapter or had been able to attend the conference in San Francisco).

The forming/organizing meeting that brought together 19 participants from 11 countries outside of the USA, was held in Brussels in early July, hosted by MCE (Management Center Europe). This is exciting stuff! Don't you agree? At the July session, a little informal, first-hand research was completed.

You see, the 19 individuals who attended each shared their personal reasons for belonging to ISPI and for pursuing a chapter that was not limited to a single country. The comments made by participants were amazingly consistent. Most indicated that finding ISPI was finally finding a professional home, where likeminded people could meet, share, and grow. They were also very consistent about their commitment to actively supporting the Society's growth and development in Europe. Several said that ISPI, through annual conferences and other activities, allowed them to meet respected professionals with whom they were able to form some very precious and sustaining friendships. Anyone who is active in the Society on the chapter or the international level, can probably relate to this comment. I know that I can.

continued on page 2

In this Issue:

4

A New News & Notes

5

Successful Online Principles & Practices Institute Prompts New Dates

6

Celebrating 40 Years: ISPI Conference Showcases the Best in Performance Improvement

8

Maximize Your Conference Experience: Attend a Workshop

9

ISPI Provides New Forum for the Discussion of Hot Topics

12

Expanding Our Horizons for Performance Improvement

16

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International Growth

continued from page 1

Many of you know that a real value for me is supporting and promoting active participation, not just membership numbers, for ISPI globally. I know, I know. Everyone is an international member, but the reality is that the "marketplace" is different outside of North America as well as from country to country outside the USA. Building membership "abroad," no less active participation in ISPI, has challenges despite the fact that HPT (Human Performance Technology) is really, I believe, a comprehensive set of concepts, tools, and techniques, that is critical for organizations globally.

The individuals who are working to form a European chapter have realized the critical importance of reaching the leaders of businesses and other organizations. They are focusing on the people who are setting the strategic direction for their organizations, not just human resources or performance improvement practitioners. Another concern of the European group is that if HPT is perceived solely, or even primarily, as an "American idea," there is a risk that it may be dismissed before it is understood. The point that needs to be made is that HPT makes good *business* sense.

Here is my personal opinion. It is critical for ISPI to take its message to organization leaders, and create some "pull through" for practitioners everywhere, but particularly outside of North America. And, it is even more essential to reach these leaders before, or at least at the same time as practitioners, if we intend to grow a strong global membership for ISPI. If we approach practitioners alone or before organization leaders, their ability to "sell" HPT will be very limited at best. Who is it, after all, that pays the bills and approves investment in performance improvement interventions? With what has been happening in the high-tech and telecommunications industries globally, for example, it's hard to read the newspaper without hearing about layoffs, shrinking margins, and cost reduction plans by companies that are domestic, international, or multinational. This is performance improvement opportunity by any other name! HPT speaks the language of business because it is focused on valuable results for organizations,

not the latest, "sexiest" or most popular solution! But, we have to communicate this message to the right audiences.

A European chapter has the potential, certainly, to facilitate membership growth by reaching organizations and professionals that are not likely to be reached any other way than by professionals working locally. Such a chapter also has the opportunity to begin to organize its own activities, as well as to partner with other chapters in augmenting and building on the conferences and institutes that ISPI conducts on the international level (and in the USA with few exceptions). Getting back to where I started with this article, the professionals who met in Brussels to work on a European chapter for ISPI, uniformly expressed the power of ISPI's message about HPT. Furthermore, they stated their commitment to "spreading the word" and being "feet on the street" in Europe. I applaud our colleagues around the world (including here in the States, of course) who are working to expand the reputation and membership numbers of ISPI as well as providing a valuable local chapter experience.

Whether you live and work in Birmingham, Alabama or Birmingham, England, I believe that the more you are involved and the more you invest your time and talent, the more you actually get out of ISPI or other similar organizations, and the more likely you are to remain a member. Speaking of the value of getting involved, . . . before serving on the Board, I knew several of my fellow Board members, but only casually or by reputation, in some cases. Three meetings later, I have had the opportunity to get to know these dedicated people much better, because working together for a common cause really does build ties between people. There are many, many valuable professionals who currently belong to ISPI, and I'm not just referring to the Gurus! I'm talking about the folks you can make a call to or contact by email when you need some advice on a difficult issue. Or, it could be someone who can help you to confirm that you're not crazy. You're not alone out there. What's that old saying? You have to be a friend to have a friend. I think you also have to consider an extension of that thought. The more you invest in an organization like ISPI, the more you will learn and grow personally.

continued on page 15

International Growth

continued from page 2

We all need to try our best to help our non-North American colleagues. Do any of you remember what it was like when you came to your first conference and knew no one or very few people? Well, think about traveling thousands of miles and maybe having English as your second language, in addition to being a newcomer. If you can remember or relate to being a little bit of an outsider, please consider the following. At the next conference, try to be open to and even proactive about meeting new people, including them in informal chats, or helping with advice, if asked, about how to choose between the many

concurrent sessions offered. If you are a presenter, try to speak clearly and distinctly in recognition of the fact that some of your audience may be translating for themselves. Just some thoughts.

Here's another idea. Maybe as an individual or a chapter, you can contact the Conference Committee, or Ellen Bodalski (ellen@ispi.org), ISPI's Director of Meetings, in advance and see if there is some way you can contribute to making the next conference "feel" as welcoming as possible to everyone who attends. When we come together annually we are increasingly a global community of professionals. This is a truly wonderful opportunity. You won't regret investing a little bit of yourself! 🙏



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