Atop the Empire State Building

By Pamela Payne
El Paso Community College

ONE OF MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE MOVIES IS SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE, with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. No matter how many times I watch it, I always love the scene at the top of the Empire State Building when Sam (Tom Hanks) and Annie (Meg Ryan) meet for the first time. When the members of the Professional Board Staff Network (PBSN) reunites each year, I feel that same magic! It was a dream come true for me to travel to New York in October for the 2018 ACCT Congress and venture to the top of the Empire State Building.

The sights of New York City were not the only highlights of being in the big city. It was a terrific opportunity for fellow PBSN members to gather together, catch up with old friends and make new ones, and learn from our colleagues. We kicked off our time in New York with the PBSN Meet & Greet on Wednesday at Carmine's Restaurant, which featured a full luncheon of Italian delicacies and desserts. PBSN extends its appreciation to Margaret Lamb, immediate past president, and Dr. Constance M. Carroll, president of the San Diego Community College District, for sponsoring this outstanding event.

Based on comments received from our PBSN members, the officers added an option of a “No-Host Breakfast” on Thursday at the Brooklyn Diner. A few of us were able to attend and spent some time just getting to know each other. The workshop kicked off later that afternoon with an excellent presentation on “Run, Hide, Fight” (active shooter training) presented by Barbara Lee Steigerwald, deputy commissioner of the New York State Department of Homeland Security. Her talk was followed by a presentation on electronic board agendas with our very own PBSN members as presenters: Jeannie Moton of Portland Community College, Cynthia Gruskos of Brookdale Community College, and Amanda Ficken-Davis of San Diego Community College District. They did a fantastic job informing the membership about different electronic board agenda options. Thank you to all our presenters.

We closed out our conference on Friday with the PBSN Business Meeting. During this year’s meeting, the PBSN bylaws were amended and a new position was created, communications coordinator. This position will assist the president, vice president, immediate past president, and secretary with social media and other aspects of serving on the executive committee. The gavel changed hands as Margaret Lamb moved to the role of immediate past president and I assumed the role of president. Lamb thanked the members of the executive committee and all members for attending the meetings. The association presented Margaret with a token of our appreciation for the great job she did during her presidency.

The newly-elected 2018-19 PBSN Executive Committee is:

- Pamela Payne - President (El Paso Community College)
- Jeannie Moton - Vice President (Portland Community College)
- Margaret Lamb - Immediate Past President (San Diego County Community College District)
- Benita Duncan - Secretary (Lansing Community College)
- Tiffany Prince - Communications Coordinator (Columbia George Community College)

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Heidi Soodsma - Central Region (Lake Shore Technical College)
Cynthia Gruskos - Northeast Region (Brookdale Community College)
Amanda Ficken-Davis - Pacific Region (San Diego County Community College District)
Sara Kleinpeter - Southern Region (Louisiana Community & Technical College System)
Esther Sonen-Yun - Western Region (Austin Community College)

Our final session in New York was a panel presentation on Microsoft Office tips and tricks led by PBSN members. Sara Kleinpeter, Amanda Ficken-Davis, and Christina Heskett of Hillsborough Community College all did a great job providing our group with some great tips to use in our day-to-day use.

One of the many highlights of the annual conference was the recognition of the regional Professional Board Staff Member awardees and the Association Professional Board Staff Member Award. This year’s outstanding awardees are:
  Rebecca Garrison, St. Louis Community College (Mo.) – Central Region
  Julie Hart, Onondaga Community College (N.Y.) – Northeast Region

Jennifer Delucchi, Los Rios Community College District (Calif.) – Pacific Region
Trish Villines, North Arkansas College (Ark.) – Southern Region
Diane Reikofski, Northeast Community College (Neb.) – Western Region

At the awards dinner on Friday night, Trish Villines received the ACCT Professional Board Staff Member award. Congratulations to all these exceptional women for their hard work and dedication to their profession.

Reunite with us again to experience the magic of PBSN this coming year. I encourage all of you to participate in the 2019 ACCT Leadership Congress and the Professional Board Staff meetings in San Francisco, California, October 16-19, 2019. The PBSN officers will be preparing an exciting agenda over the next few months as ACCT will be celebrating its golden anniversary. I am sure it will be an exceptional event that you will not want to miss!

I am excited to be your president this year and look forward to another great year of fellowship with our PBSN members.

Please check out our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/groups/ACCTPBSN/

Have a great year!
EVER SINCE I LEARNED I WOULD BE WRITING A PIECE FOR Trustee Quarterly, I tossed around ideas of what I would address. I was stretching to come up with ideas that were timely and relevant, then I stopped and looked around at my peers, my network of assistants, and heard common themes. These themes focused on the partnerships with their CEOs, none of which could be accomplished without both players. So I decided to take a different approach. I know the information in this section should be to the benefit of the Professional Board Staff members, but I wanted to address the executives.

I did a short random survey of my personal network. This sample was not intended to be a scientific study, just a quick check in with the “gatekeepers.” From the feedback I received, communication, trust, and responsibility were the themes that presented the most with this group. After mulling over those three themes and figuring out how they were related, I came to the conclusion that each is dependent upon the others. For example, there is no way to gain the trust of someone without open communication.

Of the assistants who responded to my survey, almost 70 percent have been with their executives from one to three years, and 40 percent weren’t hired by that executive. This tells me there are executives coming into positions with an assistant in place. Considering the executive and their needs, that would be the ideal in most cases. As a new executive coming into an organization, having someone with the experience and knowledge of the organizational culture is invaluable.

Although trust and responsibility were mentioned most by the respondents, communication was also an issue for some. A lot of respondents used words like two-way, open, ask questions, regular check-ins to describe their ideal communication styles. The assistants noted that communication gaps between the assistant and their executive could be easily addressed and overcome. Communication is key to moving to trust and then on to responsibility.

Trust is something that can only be built through open communication. That is a pretty safe and logical statement. But to another point, there are ripple effects that happen when trust is established. However, of the responses I received to my survey, an alarmingly high number, 55 percent, stated that there were barriers to trust being built with their executive. Sixty percent said they did not feel they were being used to their fullest potential. Some even stated that they go so far as to find other tasks and projects to keep them busy or engaged.

All assistants want to feel like their work has value, and that the work being assigned is meaningful and critical to the mission of the organization. Assistants need to feel that they too are part of the team, as much as any other administrator on the executive’s team. Most of the assistants said providing institutional knowledge, being forward thinking, and helping with workload priorities were the ideals they thought were of most value to a new executive.

I am writing this as part of those 40 percent of assistants who weren’t hired by their current executive; I was a current assistant in place for a new president. I was terrified. Not sure what to expect, what the demands would be, I convinced myself all would be okay if I did the best job I could. Having been at the organization a few years, I had institutional knowledge, I knew the college culture, I had valuable relationships, and I knew a lot of people, internal and external. I think within a few weeks of the new president starting, he understood this. He saw the value of my work, of my relationships. The communication was open right out of the gate. I am lucky — other assistants, not so much. I’ve seen and heard many stories of assistants not being valued, not being included, some even being pushed out of their positions.

In closing, I want to convey the messages I hear all too often from assistants — we are here to help. We want to help. We can help! We just need to be communicated with, trusted, and given the opportunity to succeed — we are assistants. We can do anything!