Finding Your Passion

By Christina M. Heskett, Hillsborough Community College, Florida

Passion [PASH-uhn] noun; a strong or extravagant fondness, enthusiasm, or desire for anything.

AMERICANS ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT A GREAT MANY THINGS
— God, country, life, liberty, peace, and happiness, just to name a few. One of our nation’s founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, used his passion for writing to scribe the Declaration of Independence, effectively securing our inalienable right to seek out that which drives those very passions. We are, each of us, passionate about something; if I had to choose the one thing I am most passionate about, it would be my family. But can a person be truly be passionate about their career? The answer is yes; I witnessed this firsthand while speaking with the professional board staff members who attended the 2015 ACCT Annual Congress.

Attendees kicked off this year’s conference with a meet-and-greet at Harbor House, located in San Diego’s Seaport Village. Restaurant staff provided what seemed like an endless parade of delectable edibles, including fresh guacamole and chips, fruits, vegetables, southwestern egg rolls, chicken, and meatballs marinara; then topped off the evening off with a sinfully delicious chocolate fondue. The event was an opportunity to meet peers and get to know our counterparts. The PBSN extends a heartfelt “Thank you!” to Mechell Downey, Immediate Past PBSN president, and Dr. James Utterback, president of Seminole State College of Oklahoma, for sponsoring the evening’s festivities. For those of you who were not able to attend due to a prior commitment, mark your calendars now for this year’s meet-and-greet, which will take place on October 5, immediately following the opening session at the 2016 ACCT Annual Congress.

Others might wonder what, as “secretaries,” we could possibly be passionate about. Well, if one clings to the old notion that a secretary’s workday consists of taking shorthand, typing, answering phones, and filing our nails, then I would also be wondering that very thing. And while many of us accept the title of Board Secretary, we are not secretaries — we are much more than that. We are administrative professionals and participatory members of the offices in which we work. Our passion shines through in all that we do, whether we are providing assistance to a student, creating a budget, handling complaints, or reconciling trustee travel. We are passionate about our students, our schools, higher education, and moreover, the opportunities for advancement and pathways to success that these institutions provide.

As a reminder to those who attended this year’s workshop of just how much the role of secretary (or assistant, if you prefer) has evolved, we kicked off our workshop with the icebreaker Secretary Jeopardy. Much like the game show Jeopardy!, attendees were asked challenging questions about fictional TV and movie secretaries, with a few Daily Doubles on the cutting-edge office equipment of yesteryear, such as the pinball typewriter and the mimeograph, thrown in for good measure. Each team worked together to answer questions like, “Wonder Woman’s alter ego Diana Prince began her career as Secretary to the Office of Strategic Services. She rose to the rank of Major in what branch of the U.S. military?” The answer? I bet your
secretary knows! And while some questions were quite difficult, the icebreaker served its purpose and got everyone talking. A few lucky attendees took home DVDs of the movies *Working Girl*, *Nine to Five*, and *The Devil Wears Prada*, as well as other gifts donated by the PBSN Executive Committee.

Donna Miller, the workshop’s guest speaker and former trustee of the North Orange County Community College District, presented on Diplomacy in the Workplace. The presentation focused on creating a positive climate, being a good listener, conflict resolution techniques, and more. While most of us would not be where we are today without at least some of these skills, this was a great way to share new ideas and affect, in a more positive way, our working environment.

We wrapped up this year’s session with roundtable discussions on a variety of topics that included trustee training manuals, travel, presidential searches, board training, security issues, and best practices. And, as in previous years, the forum produced in-depth discussions and a sharing of ideas we rarely get to participate in at work. Attendees glean new ways of spotting problems and learning alternative methods for implementing change. Results from a survey posted after the workshop confirmed that this is the part of the conference that attendees enjoy the most, and once again, attendees requested the addition of a morning session to make the workshops an all-day affair.

On October 16th, the PBSN held its annual business meeting, re-electing many familiar faces and adding some new ones. The gavel changed hands as Mechell Downey moved to the role of Immediate Past President and I ascended to the role of President. Mechell thanked the Executive Committee for its hard work, commitment, and dedication to ensuring a successful conference.

The newly-elected 2016 PBSN Executive Committee is: Tina Heskett, President; Alonia Sharps, Vice President;
Absolutely, but forcefulness is always executed in a caring manner. and politeness. Are there times when the MOM has to be forceful? respond, and that response is always provided with insight, care, and old ideas are refreshed and made better. That's what we do! those of our presidents and trustees better. New ideas are vetted provides access to loads of resources that can make our lives and work easier. The PBSN Congress is helpful for all involved. The sessions are an opportunity to share, network, and learn best practices. The PBSN Network (PBSN) and attending the PBSN sessions during the ACCT Congress can make our lives and work easier. The MOM works with the president to develop agendas for board retreats and topics for presentation at the ACCT Congress. If the presentation is accepted, the MOM collects all necessary materials for the development of the PowerPoint and handouts. After arriving at the Congress, the MOM ensures that all is ready for the board presentation.

The chair of the board always fosters professional development for trustees. Whether in the form of board retreats or presentations at the fall ACCT Leadership Congress, the MOM is instrumental in making it happen. The MOM works with the president to develop agendas for board retreats and topics for presentation at the ACCT Congress. If the presentation is accepted, the MOM collects all necessary materials for the development of the PowerPoint and handouts. After arriving at the Congress, the MOM ensures that all is ready for the board presentation.

One final note about passion: With rising tensions around the world and turmoil on college campuses throughout the country, it is important now, more than ever, to embrace your passion and cultivate it. Whether you are a patriot who believes in the importance of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, a faculty member who revels in fostering dissent, a chancellor confronted with racial tensions, or a secretary trying to finish your degree, there is something you are passionate about — find it. Foster it. Share it with the world.

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M.O.M. to the Board of Trustees

By Alonia C. Sharps, Prince George's Community College

Many board support staff members serve as the Multitasking Operational Manager (MOM) to the board of trustees. We affectionately call ourselves the “Board MOM.” Having served many board members during the tenure of three college presidents, it is an honor and a privilege to have the confidence of the president and board, and to be given this title. When written out, “multitasking operational manager” is a good way to describe the position, and in its acronym form, it aptly suggests the nurturing and guiding roles that many of us do play. As MOM to my college’s board, I am indeed a multitasker. The board sees me as a senior management administrator who is part of the senior leadership team, and also as the individual who provides for their needs and wishes.

When we think about the title of MOM, we recognize that we are important in the lives of many individuals. What are the tasks that would not be completed if it were not for MOM? We make sure that board meetings are scheduled, board agendas are drafted, reviewed, and distributed, board meals are planned, and travel is booked for professional development. We ensure the board receives information in a timely manner, and we also fulfill countless other tasks that ideally make the life of a board member easier.

We, as board support staff, must always remember that our trustees are part-time volunteers who govern our institutions and serve as advocates for the colleges and the students we serve. There is no question asked or request received from a trustee that should be considered trivial. The MOM is always ready to respond, and that response is always provided with insight, care, and politeness. Are there times when the MOM has to be forceful? Absolutely, but forcefulness is always executed in a caring manner. The MOM is able to support the board by having information that is accessible at all times, such as food preferences and allergies, preferred modes of travel (car, train, or airplane), hotel accommodations (queen or king bed, lower or higher hotel floor, near or away from the elevator, smoking or non-smoking room or floor), and contact information for home and work and the best way to contact the trustee. This MOM keeps the information on her iPad and iPhone. It is readily available. There are times when trustees are scheduled to travel and plans change. The MOM has to be able to contact the affected individuals and just keep things moving.

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The MOM always seeks innovative ways to serve the needs of the trustees. Being active with the Professional Board Staff Network (PBSN) and attending the PBSN sessions during the ACCT Congress is helpful for all involved. The sessions are an opportunity to share, network, and learn best practices. The PBSN provides access to loads of resources that can make our lives and those of our presidents and trustees better. New ideas are vetted and old ideas are refreshed and made better. That’s what we do!

Last, but not least — is the MOM’s job ever completed? Take it from this MOM, the answer is no, and I would not have it any other way!