

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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Quo Vadis: Whither Goest Thou?

Translated from Latin to English, quo vadis means “Whither goest thou?” Or translated into modern English, “Where are you going?”

Where I am going is a question environmental health practitioners ask themselves as they enter into the profession or choose to pursue an education in environmental health. We begin a path to serve the public. When we begin that service, we need to consider where and how we can serve. Further, we should consider how to develop in the profession and how to rise to levels where we can lead and contribute to the growth of the field. We need to know and create a path to grow in both knowledge and status.

I am reminded of the opening lines of *Cru-sade*, a 1999 science fiction TV series, where the techno-mage Galen asks, “Who are you? What do you want? Where are you going? Who do you serve? And who do you trust?” These questions are poignant because we can use them to guide our careers and development paths in environmental health.

Who are you? This question is answered by understanding the area in which you wish to practice. The field of environmental health has multiple areas of practice, including air pollution, food safety, water quality, healthy housing, noise control, onsite wastewater, recreational water, and pest control, to name a few.

Identify the area of practice that brings you fulfillment. Do you wish to be a generalist or a specialist? Identify people who can provide you with advice on the areas you wish to practice in, and who can give you advice and opportunities to gain exposure to your area of interest. It may seem that this advice

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is the will to try and
the belief that it is
actually possible.”
—Joel Brown*

is designed for early-career professionals, but it can be useful throughout your career. As we grow in the profession and transition from one situation to another, we are exposed to things that drive our passions and spark our interests. Our inquisitive nature to gain knowledge and to use it to resolve environmental health concerns helps to prevent the recurrence of those concerns. Recognizing our duty to protect human health and prevent disease is a hallmark of being an environmental health professional.

The next thing we need to consider is how we get where we want to go and what the requirements are for our career goals. What types of introductory skills do you need beyond formal academic education? Is a credential needed? Which credential is needed and how do you acquire it? The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) offers several credentials for environmental health professionals, with the gold standard for environmental health being the Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS) credential.

NEHA has an excellent website (www.neha.org/credentials) that shares information on the three credentials it offers and information on the process of acquiring those credentials. There is also contact information to reach out to NEHA staff to gain more information about the credentials and the credentialing process. Also seek out professionals who have the credentials to gain insight on how they prepared for the credential exam, what challenges they faced, and how their strengths assisted them in preparing for the exam.

Growth includes more than the acquisition of professional knowledge and credentials. Personal growth is a large part of professional growth. Set yourself goals for advancement. Create a roadmap from where you are currently to where you would like to be. Understand the path you need to follow and what it will take to get there.

In my path, I have had many mentors and guides. I knew that I wanted more than job satisfaction and that I wanted to serve the profession as well. Steve Ward, past-president of the Massachusetts Environmental Health Association (MEHA), recruited me to serve on the MEHA Board of Directors, where I was mentored by several board members. While attending the 2010 Yankee Conference and after receiving the Dr. Joseph Goldfarb Award, I met Dr. Welford Roberts. He was inspirational, and our interaction piqued my interest in serving on the NEHA Board of Directors. My mentors gave me advice on the path I wished to walk.

So, in your quest to advance, find mentors who will provide you with advice and information on moving ahead. I found that participating in my state affiliate organiza-

tion not only helped me grow intellectually but also enhanced my opportunities for professional growth and networking. The best opportunity I ever had was attending a NEHA Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition. Attendance at NEHA AECs and affiliate conferences provided avenues for me to increase knowledge, meet other environmental health professionals, and build networks.

There were plenty of people who were willing to assist me, provide guidance, and be my devil's advocate when needed. I found people I could trust, and I respected their unfiltered feedback, all of which allowed me to grow. There are many of us willing to help you grow.

NEHA offers the Environmental Health Leadership Academy (www.neha.org/environmental-health-leadership-academy), as well as the NEHA Mentoring Program (www.neha.org/mentor-program), to assist you in growing professionally and learning to lead. The gem, however, is our online Community platform, where you can ask for assistance and guidance in many different topical areas, with a cadre of professionals available to assist you (<https://community.neha.org>).

So, now that you know what you want and how to get it, NEHA provides several opportunities for assistance, guidance, and growth: monthly webinars, the AEC, the Environmental Health Leadership Academy,

the NEHA Mentoring Program, our online Community platform, scholarships, access to subject matter experts and technical advisors, advocacy, and career assistance. These are only a few examples of the support work we do and the opportunities we provide for you. Please avail yourself of these opportunities to increase your knowledge and status.

As Joel Brown, an All-American hurdler from Ohio State, said, "The only thing that stands between you and your dream is the will to try and the belief that it is actually possible." ✨


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Did You Know?

Since 1937, we have led the way for environmental health professionals to achieve defined competencies through our credentials. These benchmarks of excellence have become the gold standard in recognizing professionals who are uniquely equipped to handle the wide breadth of environmental health issues. Learn more about the credentials we offer at www.neha.org/credentials.

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