

# Trends and Issues Facing Professional Leaders Today

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Preparation, accreditation, examination, certification, regulation, standardization, and organizations. It is difficult for me to place much concern in these internal issues when there are so many external issues facing us.

During the NRPA mid-year meetings in Washington, DC, NTRS scheduled appointments on Capitol Hill to discuss the inclusion of therapeutic recreation in health care reform. As I walked to Capitol Hill along Pennsylvania Avenue, I sidestepped many homeless people. I questioned how I was going to convince legislators that therapeutic recreation is an effective treatment, when we have failed to convince the general public that recreation is worthwhile and can have a positive effect on every aspect of society, including people without homes and those housed in prisons. Just three days ago, on April 5, 1995, the North Carolina House gave tentative approval to a bill that would eliminate "frills," such as basketball courts, televisions and exercise rooms, from new North Carolina prisons.

Thirty years ago, Dr. Paul Haun stated that if the recreation worker claimed to be a therapist and failed to demonstrate the equivalence of the contribution fairly measured against that of other supportive medical disciplines, it would seem unwise for hospital administrators to support such programs. We paid little attention to his advice, and as a profession, chose the path of therapy rather than social services. Our recreation activities gradually became values clarification, therapeutic touch, relaxation therapy, reality orientation, remotivation, sensory training, and assertiveness training; we sophisticated our language with terms like "high-level wellness." Dr. Haun warned that "The recreation worker who dreams of starched white uniforms and a clinical air, has missed the point."

Two years later, in his President's report to the Board of Governors of the National Recreation and Park Association, John Logue wrote:

Of major concern (of the Therapeutic Recreation Society), during the past year, has been the apparent lack of professional concern and more importantly, of definitive action in the area of human rights by therapeutic recreators. The total recreation profession, recognizing the effect that it can have on social change, must accept its responsibility in this area if it is to be a true profession. The Society is asking the Professional Division to conscientiously establish constructive programs that contribute to the alleviation, amelioration and mitigation of the measureless calamity of human injustices in whatever form it exists.

Today we are faced with issues such as homelessness, public education, unemployment, dysfunctional families, crime, alienated youth, socioeconomic stratification,

violence, environmental hazards, poverty, and universal health care. These social ills are at the roots of our profession. Have we forgotten our legacy; the settlement houses, the playground movement, and the role of the social reformer? Recreation and park services were founded on humanistic values and ecological perspectives with the mission of improving the quality of life in urban and rural areas. I strongly believe the recreation and parks profession can affect each of these issues; one avenue is through our curricula.

One obvious trend is that students are becoming more interested in the private sector and less interested in public services. As a result, our curricula tend to follow suit. I suggest academicians consider two ideas. First, place more curriculum emphases on public services and connect with social work, political science, sociology, and geography; encourage students to consider alternatives to private entrepreneurship and business. The second idea is to provide leisure education to the academic community.

The main purpose of the first idea is to instill in students a social consciousness. A new way of thinking, as expressed by Ornstein and Ehrlich, is needed. A genuine caring for people and the environment, rather than profit, would carry over into community services, with people being the beneficiaries.

The second idea is that of leisure education. If we choose to intervene in the work and spend cycle, where leisure is placed in a passive mood and where we demand to be amused, leisure education becomes extremely important. According to George Cutten, former president of Colgate University:

It is evident that we shall solve our problem by means of two complementary methods. In the first place it shall be through communities organizing to bring about desirable means for occupying leisure time, and, in the second place, the individual will be trained to spend...leisure in a satisfying manner. Little can be done until public opinion and community spirit instill a general ideal, and community organization aids in consummating it.

He continued, "Why should we not have a School of Leisure, as we now have schools of business, of law, and of medicine?" Sixty years later, Bartlett Giamatti wrote:

It has long been my conviction that we can learn far more about the conditions, and values, of a society by contemplating how it chooses to play, to use its free time, to take its leisure, than by examining how it goes about its work.

Doug Sessoms stated at the Leisure Education Conference in, "When we talk about leisure education, we talk about the wise and productive use of free time. On one hand, we speak of the need to destroy the work ethic, yet we are perfectly willing to impose on the public another work ethic - the productive use of time."

To conclude my comments, I want to continue quoting Doug Sessoms - "Do we really believe in leisure or only in activity? We have to come to a resolution of this conflict in our philosophy - the productive use of time and leisure as freedom - if leisure education is to be accepted." I believe these are issues still facing our profession.

*Geoffrey Godbey, Professor in Hotel, Tourism, and Recreation Management, Penn State University:*

We live in a world in which change is so extraordinarily exponential that most of us should have more questions than answers. Most of us should be seeking as much information and knowledge as we can about what is happening around us; we are in the midst of simultaneous revolutions and we have little to do with shaping them. Our field is going to be reshaped and reorganized in many ways by external forces.

I am not going to try to list all the forces. But, for example, let me suggest that the population in Europe and North America represents about 10% of the people in the world. In fifty years, in our own country about one percent of our population will own about 50% of the financial assets of the country. The basis for our economy has gone from agriculture to tourism. We depend on a post modern mass media in which truth is manufactured so that we think crime is out of control. We think we are working longer when we are probably working fewer hours, although more rushed. We think that we live in an urban society when the majority of us live in the suburbs. Some of us think the elderly are victimized more when in reality they are victimized far less than anybody else. The elderly are the wealthiest group in our society and the biggest welfare recipients in our society. Unless we get some idea of what is happening in the world, I think it is hard for us to shape our own field.

Recreation and parks people have historically not been information users. They have been doers, rather than thinkers, and have been darn good doers. At their best, they are just what we need. They are just the type of community organizers, public servants, and public spirited people that communities need. The question is whether that community contribution by parks and recreation professionals will be recognized. My assessment is that our recognition is a long shot.

For us to prosper in the coming years, we have to develop alliances. The use of leisure is a fairly critical variable in terms of health and wellness, and that has real dollar value. Money and time is what our modern culture is about— they are the currencies of our modern culture. We have an extraordinary contribution to make to health, particularly public health. But, do you make people healthy by providing tranquility or tranquilizers? Do you make people healthy by providing walking trails and exercise machines or hopelessly antiquated 19th century model institutions?

The alliances we have to make relate to several areas. For example, life will be prolonged in the “have cultures” and we have a critical role to play regarding aging. Tourism, at-risk-youth, and land management are other areas. The so-called federal and state land managers are increasingly involved with recreation. You can see it in agencies like the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service. We are now working in situations in which managing people is more important than working with the loblolly pine. How do we get ourselves involved and stay allied with such organizations?

At-risk-youth are an issue, but so are at-risk-humans. Seventy-five percent of the people in the world do repetitive tasks and are relatively low skilled; they could be

replaced right now by machines, robots and computers. In many cases for parks and recreation professionals, we are going to work as specialists on teams whose concerns are something other than recreation and parks. We are going to have to be concerned about what people do with their free time.

We must keep in mind that the people who started this field, the social reformers and the puritans, never saw recreation and leisure as an end in itself. They always saw recreation as a means to address problems. Some of the problems that we are going to have to address in a have and have-not culture are going to deal with issues like health and the prevention of crime. There is so much ignorance in our culture. We appear not to know what to do. We have the highest percentage of educated people than any society in the world. Yet, there is a lot of dumbness in our society - a tremendous amount of stupidity. For example, we have the highest rate of gun ownership in the world. We are almost ready to go back to cowboys and Indians or bovine-people verses native Americans, or whatever we are labeling things these days.

I think recreation and parks professionals are actually going to be serving as specialists on teams within universities or within communities that have dramatically different concerns than providing leisure services. We have something to offer. We have specialized knowledge to offer. In an information driven economy, the generalist is gradually disappearing and is being replaced by specialists. These specialists are usually people with more than one specialty. Recreation and park people will need more than one specialty.

Finally, I am reminded of Tip O'Neill's comment that all politics are local. In parks and recreation we should remember that comment. The best practitioners and the best educators are the ones who remember politics are local. They know what is going on in their backyard. They know about the quality of life. They know what people are doing and they know what is happening. They have formed local alliances. In terms of education, I think groups like SPRE, that Doug Sessoms and most of us have worked for, are decidedly secondary in importance to our ability to work within our own university community, our own town, or our own hospital. The good news is that the American public thinks recreation and leisure is important. Every bit of survey data we get argues its importance. Every bit of data we get about the links between exercise of mind and body argues that we are on the right tract. They are playing our song. Can we dance to that song?

*Michelle Park, Director of Professional Services, National Recreation and Park Association:*

I am going to talk to you today about two issues and trends. The first relates to professional certification issues and the second concerns benefits-based management.

I think we are going to continue to see more specialized certification. In 1992 the NRPA National Certification Board approved the Aquatic Facility Operators certification, and last year the Playground Safety Inspectors certification program won NRPA approval. Both of these certifications are technical in nature. Both deal with risk management and maintenance. These are both exam based and test a specific technical level of knowledge. We are going to continue to see other specializations surface in such areas as adventure education, youth sports, or park law enforcement.

In certification we are definitely seeing a growing number of jobs acknowledging CLP certification as a desirable qualification for hiring. Support and interest are growing, although few believe the CLP will be a mandatory. Just within our own NRPA job bulletin this past year we have seen a 20% increase in jobs listing CLP as a desirable qualification. The types of jobs that we are seeing this increase in are entry level positions, supervisory positions, and some mid-level management as well as desirable qualification for directors level positions. These changes are telling us that the younger professionals in the field are advocates for certification. Ninety nine percent of those CLPs who have acquired their certification within the last five years said they will be requiring or making CLP a desirable qualification in job openings in the future. Thus, we likely will be seeing the need for more CLPs in the next twenty years.

The second issue or trend I want to discuss really does not fit in with certification at all. I believe, however, it is one of the most critical new concepts that will impact our public parks and recreation departments in the next twenty years. It is a relatively new management concept called benefits-based management (BBM). It is being tested primarily with the US Forest Service and some of our agencies. BBM focuses on participant outcomes and how these outcomes will either improve a condition or prevent a worsening condition. A number of people have been working on this concept for more than five years. We know that parks and recreation impacts behavior. This management concept can, in fact, validate that belief.

Recently I had the fortunate opportunity to visit Portland, Oregon and I called on the city's Recreation Director, Charles Jordan, who has been involved with the BBM concept. I asked about the most important issues for now and the future. He told me about this benefits-based planning, as he calls it. The first thing he does with preparing for the budget is to ask each community center director what the conditions are that s/he wants to change. Is it to reduce vandalism, reduce litter, or increase self-esteem of 8-10 year olds? The next question he asks is "Which recreation activities will influence this behavioral change, improve the condition, or prevent a worse condition from occurring?" The next question is "How are you going to measure and evaluate this outcome?" The last question is, "How much money do you need?" Gone are the days of counting heads in our programs; attendance figures should be replaced with documenting the behavioral changes that reflect improved conditions through recreation programs.

Before I conclude, let me say that for the benefits basis management concept to be implemented, training programs must be developed. We have got to retrain our professionals and educate our students. Training needs to take precedence. I know that some of that is happening, but we need to accelerate our efforts.

*Deborah Scales, Director of Marketing and Cultural Outreach, Greensboro Parks and Recreation Department:*

When asked to be on this panel, I became extremely apprehensive. I always have a lot to say, but when I am given five to seven minutes to say it, I really have to give a condensed version. I am very committed to any task I choose to undertake and I have a lot to say about parks and recreation.

Regarding trends and issues facing the profession today, I am going to share with you from a personal perspective. I am going to talk about the issue of diversity, specifically cultural diversity. Leisure service attitudes have changed dramatically since the days of assimilation, when everyone was expected to look and act the same. Today, leisure service providers should recognize the need to have leisure opportunities and environments in which all kinds of people can participate. How does your agency measure up? Sometimes we do not want to ask ourselves this question. We always think that we are doing the best or the most, but that may not be the case.

In our profession there seems to be thought given to certain differences. We do not have a problem dealing with age. We do not have a problem dealing with gender. We do not have a problem dealing with abilities. We do not have a problem dealing with interest. We program for toddlers, youth, teens, adults, senior citizens, males, females, men, women, boys, and girls. We have programs for special populations and those for the general public. We do football, basketball, fine arts, handicrafts, dance, drama, and music. We think we have done our jobs. In reality, we have only just begun. The time for such a general attitude is past. The last thing recreation professions need is to be labeled dinosaurs on the issues of culturally diverse programs and services.

I do not know if it makes our planning easier for the next year or for the next activity, but we tend not to assess all the environments and the individuals who are around us. Here's an example. A second grade teacher posed a simple question to a class; "There are four blackbirds sitting in a tree. You take a slingshot and shoot one of them. How many are left?" "Three" answered the seven year-old European with certainty. "One subtracted from four leaves three." "Zero" answered the seven year-old African with equal certainty, "If you shoot one bird, the others will fly away." The problem as it turned out was not simple at all.

In some ways this story gets to the core of cultural diversity. We need to recognize diversity, understand it, and program for it. Like it or not America, North Carolina, your city, my city, your town, my town, your community, my community, they are "achangin'." By the year 2030, people of color will constitute 51% of the US population. The implications are profound. The ability of the leisure service industry to move into the 21st Century with the renewed sense of preeminence will depend on its ability to effectively implement culturally diverse programs and services. Many agencies find themselves already providing culturally diverse programs and services; those groups who anticipate trends rather than follow them are taking proactive steps.

Cultural diversity describes reality. It means opportunity. It means acceptance, awareness, and understanding. I have been working in the area of cultural diversity and outreach by chance. One day my director looked at me and said, "Deborah you can do it." I had no idea what I was supposed to do and why it was so difficult. But I knew it was the human thing to do and it was the right thing to do. Cultural diversity programming is not token programming. You do not just take a traditional program and tag on an aspect relative to culture.

Many of you will say that you do not exclude anyone in your programs. But my question to you is, "Do you include everyone?" You will have to answer that question first for yourself and then see how your attitude coincides with that of your agency. Equality has always been a guiding principle in our country, but when you look at cultural diversity, it is not so much dealing with equality, but equity. Often times you think equal is what everyone would want or what they aspire to have, but equity and fairness is that major goal.

I conclude by asking you to take a personal assessment regarding cultural diversity. You have to decide where you are in terms of dealing with issues of cultural diversity. I ask that you take within your agency or within your institution an internal and external assessment. Do not be afraid to expose your weaknesses for they will surely be your strengths.

*Mike Waters, Executive Director, North Carolina Parks and Recreation Society:*

In noting issues and trends that might effect us in the field, I am bombarded with individual issues on a regular basis whenever the phone rings at the State Society office. A couple of issues, however, have gotten a more discussion and attention over the last two years.

One of those imposing issues is talk about mergers and consolidations. We have been around it. We have talked about it. We have almost talked about it to death. Are they good, are they bad? We discussed and fussed, but now mergers and consolidations more of a reality. Who is going to look after parks? Is it going to be parks and recreation, public works, or the planning department? There are good examples out there and I am going to be monitoring them closely in the next couple of years to see how this delivery of service transpires in the community. Will it be a better delivery services? Will it be more cost effective?

The thing that really concerns me is change for the sake of change. A sense exists that you are not reinventing unless you are changing something. We have got to take responsibility for changing or not changing; we have got to do a better job of preparing ourselves for change because it may open up new opportunities. Sometimes a better delivery of services does exist for the citizens. We have got to put our egos aside and look at that service delivery and the change that might occur.

The other issue I want to discuss is parks and recreation politics. I have been to any number of conferences and workshops talking about how important local politics are. We get a little antsy every time there is an election. We have got to get more politically smart. We have got to know what makes people tick. We have got to be prepared to educate these new politicians. Unless you have been living under the ground for the last six or eight months, you know a lot of new politicians are out there. We have got to be prepared to play that political game. I think about "playing" the political game. Who is better prepared to play a game than us. We have got to get our ducks in a row and be ready to go in at a moment's notice and play that game when the time comes to play. You have only got so many bullets in your gun, know when to use them.

*Wayne Weston, Director of Charlotte-Mecklenberg County Parks and Recreation Department:*

I went through a park merger and several key staff here endured that ordeal. It was about a seven to nine year process. It touches on everything you have heard today and, in particular it touches on what Deborah had to say regarding providing services to a comprehensive community. Everyday for me for the last two and one half years has been like heading to the OK Corral and hoping that I was one of the Earp guys and not one of the Youngers.

As you look at our profession and how we are incorporated at local levels and state levels, we are a culprit of myopic planning. We do not see beyond the recreation center or the local department. We do not like to engage ourselves with public transportation, public libraries, and many other aspects of our communities. Where does this myopia lead? It leads to nothing less than institutional racism. It leads to a two-tiered level in our communities. Look at what has happened with our movement of white neighborhoods to suburbia. In suburbia there is a higher rate of services and a higher level of expenditure; the exact opposite occurs in the inner city and in the poor and less affluent areas of the rural communities. We have a real task before us. As Doug Sessoms pointed out, we must rediscover our mission.

Another major issue is communication. Locally we have become involved in the taking back of our neighborhood programs with a heavy emphasis on communication through both print and electronic media. You hear a lot about partnerships. Joint planning which leads to joint use continues to be an issue at the local level. Few practitioners across the state or across the region, however, are asked to serve on design teams for new libraries, new schools, and new hospitals. Partnerships and joint use are issues that must be addressed, a battle that must be fought.

From a cultural diverse standpoint, I really do not know what all the clamor is because America theoretically has always been a culturally diverse nation. The strength of our profession is probably that we have addressed diversity. Think about all of the positives since the Civil Rights Movement like women in sports. I think the concern about diversity is rooted in fear. Fear is normal—it is an appropriate response, a challenge in competition. It is a constant companion of champions regardless of their field of endeavor. We cannot afford to be called park and recreation practitioners that are lethargic or afraid to push for political input. We've got to learn that game and we've got to stand up and be heard.

A key partner during this era of collaboration discussion for every community relates to the "boys in blue"—those men and women who are in law enforcement which is where the money is. It's almost appalling to me to see our local police force has received in excess of 400 new officers in the past two fiscal years. What are they doing? They're practicing parks and recreation by bicycle using community policing techniques and tactics. Police officers are going into recreation centers and playgrounds. They're doing our job and we're allowing them to do it. Why? Because we don't stand up and speak against it. There's discussion in our community regarding what park and recreation services might belong in the police services in the inner city. That's something that we will partner on and something we will not give up.



The Federal Department of Justice statistics from last year showed that three billion dollars was spent on incarcerating teens with an average of \$29,000 spent per teen. This is compared to the national average of \$3.14 spent per person for recreation programs. We need to expand afterschool hours programs and use traditional recreation models. Why should young people be taken to the jail when we want to take them to the recreation center?

Without communication, there is mistrust, hate, disrespect, and anger. We keep to ourselves and then expect everyone in the community to rally around parks and recreation. It doesn't necessarily happen all the time. What we've done recently is to expand our interest in citizen input areas. With the merger of Charlotte and Mecklenberg County, we've gone through a major restructuring and reengineering of our services. We've touched all the right bases with the appropriate layers of management, dealing with their core values and their responsibilities to the community. But we've now reached out and decentralized our own department into park districts. Within each one of those park districts, a citizens advisory council has been appointed by the overall park commission. This expanded citizen design has not only the opportunity to reconnect, but to educate the public about our mission. It gives us an additional 72 volunteers that can carry our word forward. These individuals will aid with a \$100 million bond referendum this fall. These people will be completely encapsulated in our planning process for the next four months before we begin that campaign.

I think this is a tough time for public managers at the municipal and county levels. It's tough because of political leadership. We've all heard the idea of doing more with less. In parks and recreation, it's old hat. I heard "doing more with less" the first time in 1968; each and every year the manager brings out his budget message and the same message is there. We've learned to adapt. Maybe we're a little better than the others because we're not run off by that particular attitude of doing more with less.

Technology, privatization and out-sourcing are methods that can be used effectively to address issues without removing funding levels from the inner city. What's happened politically is the empowerment of a few people who do not always support public services. A minority of uninformed citizens run for public office as compared to days of old when civic leaders were in charge. Today, few community stewards run for office. Many elected officials have little ability to make tough decisions that affect people. Political response has become more and more a move towards the men and women in blue with a focus on larger jails and lengthier terms of service.

The last issue that I'll touch on is addressed to educators. We need your help more than ever at the OK Corral. We need you to send more students to us with background in marketing, not just promotions, but the marketing of the park and recreation services. I like what I've been reading and hearing regarding benefits-based management and planning because annually, in budget processes, we're being asked for measurable outcomes regarding social benefits, economic benefits, and environmental benefits. We've got to have students who come to us who can put together departmental marketing plans at the local level. We need new employees with negotiation skills because we are

using out-sourcing and privatization. Employees have to know how to negotiate those contracts. If not, we'll be taken to the cleaners. We need to develop media savvy. For example, we need to teach our students how reporters think. We've got to be able to deal with these educational challenges because they are major issues from the OK Corral.

In closing, we have to continue to be challenged by the ability to identify and provide services for people in our communities, both the haves and the have nots, both the pave it and play on it and the tree hugger groups. Green spaces are going to be even more valuable in 2020 than they are today. We've got to be cautious as we set policy and move forward to guarantee from a moral standpoint that green spaces and recreation areas are available for everyone today and for future generations.