

PATHWAYS TO THE PRESIDENCY

PART II: MAKING THE JOURNEY

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“It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters in the end.”

— Ursula K. LeGuin, novelist (1929–)

The president of AMWA must be a fellow of AMWA and must have held several positions on the Executive Committee (EC) or must have served on the EC for at least 3 years; in either case, the president must have been on the EC the year immediately prior to becoming president-elect (AMWA Executive Committee Handbook, 2004).

The first part of this 2-article series (*see page 167*) discussed the structure of AMWA's national governing bodies, their interrelationships, the work they do, and the opportunities for members to serve in the national organization. In this article, we discuss how your participation at different levels of AMWA could become a pathway to the presidency. Whether or not you want to pursue a leadership role, it is important for you to know how AMWA's leaders are chosen. The objective of both articles, therefore, is to educate AMWA members, to encourage participation in AMWA, and to inspire some of you to start on this pathway.

STARTING YOUR JOURNEY: MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

If you aspire to the presidency of AMWA or wish to contribute in some other capacity at the national level, you must be identified as someone who makes a contribution. You can begin this process by becoming involved with your local chapter. Get noticed locally as someone who is willing, eager, and able to get the job done, no matter what that job may be. Being a remarkable chapter member is often a channel to positions in the national organization.

If for some reason you can't participate at the chapter level, you can begin your journey by volunteering at the national level. AMWA needs volunteers both locally and nationally. You can indicate your desire to serve AMWA and your areas of interest by completing the Willingness-to-Serve form (*see page 175*), which is also available on the AMWA Web site (www.amwa.org). If you hear from a colleague about a position that interests you, ask your colleague to suggest you as a candidate for the position. Once you become involved—in whatever capacity—prove that you can do the job. Contribute at meetings. Think creatively and offer ideas. Volunteer for projects and do good work. Follow through. Complete your assignments early or on time.

Consider all sides of each issue and be diplomatic. Don't be afraid to state your opinions, but seek out and consider those of others. Being viewed as fair-minded is a key characteristic of AMWA leadership. And, importantly, involve others. Those you bring along with you will help you get your job done and reflect your good judgment and delegation skills—attributes you will need as you progress to positions of increasing responsibility.

Probably the most expeditious pathway to the presidency is to become involved at both the chapter and national levels. Such involvement will vastly increase your exposure to other AMWA members and the current leaders in the organization. If you do a good job, you will be recognized and tapped for positions of increasing responsibility.

THE TRADITIONAL ROUTE: INVOLVEMENT THROUGH CHAPTER ACTIVITY

You can work toward the presidency of AMWA in many ways. The common and traditional means is involvement at the chapter level. Becoming active at the chapter level is easy, especially if your chapter meetings are held nearby. Make it a priority to attend chapter meetings and regional conferences. Get to know other chapter members by taking advantage of volunteer opportu-

nities such as helping to plan a meeting, presenting at a meeting, working on a chapter conference, or helping with your chapter newsletter or Web site. As you become more involved, depending on the structure of your chapter, you could serve as program, membership, or publicity chair; newsletter editor; Web site chair; membership liaison; chapter conference coordinator; chapter officer; or chapter delegate to the national Board of Directors (BOD). Check the chapters section of AMWA's Web site to identify positions in your chapter that would be of interest to you.

Serving as a chapter delegate to the BOD is particularly desirable for those interested in becoming involved in AMWA at the national level. A key part of the chapter delegate's responsibility is attending the BOD meetings held each year in the spring and at the annual conference. By attending these meetings, the delegate has the opportunity to meet and work directly with AMWA officers, other members of the Executive Committee (EC), and the other chapter delegates. Chapter delegates are responsible for bringing chapter issues forward for BOD consideration and guidance, acting as the chapter's voice in considering and voting on national issues, and collecting information from the BOD and

disseminating it to the chapter membership. EC members are always seeking new talent, and they know that BOD meetings provide one of the best opportunities to find well-qualified individuals. Some chapters have had difficulty finding members who are both willing and able to be delegates, so if you are interested in becoming a delegate, contact your chapter president. You'll be serving your chapter and taking advantage of a tremendous opportunity to be part of AMWA's governing body. If your chapter does not currently have a president, contact AMWA's administrator of chapters and membership. Current department administrators are listed on the AMWA Web site, in the AMWA Membership Directory, and in part I of this series.

If you become a chapter delegate, volunteer to serve for more than 1 year if your chapter bylaws permit. It can take a year or more in this position to fully understand the role and function of the BOD and to begin to contribute substantively. Serving for a longer period also gives you more opportunity to prove your worth, to get to know the members of the BOD, and for them to get to know you. While serving, demonstrate your value: volunteer to serve on ad hoc committees and task forces, contribute to the discussion in the meetings, network, and get acquainted with the other delegates and the members of the EC. If you are interested in a particular area, such as publications or the annual conference, introduce yourself to that administrator and ask to become more involved. Make positive, concrete suggestions for improvement, and volunteer to help implement those recommendations. Your initiative will be welcomed!

THE PATH LESS TRAVELED: INVOLVEMENT BEGINNING AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

What if you live hours from where your chapter meets or your schedule doesn't allow you to attend chapter meetings? Consider starting your journey at the national level. Prior involvement at the chapter level is not a "prerequisite" for serving nationally. Look for opportuni-

ties to volunteer by reading the monthly mini-mailing from AMWA headquarters, which often contains announcements of upcoming events, programs, or initiatives. Identify the primary contact and make a phone call! Read the quarterly *AMWA Journal*, which is always full of news about the organization and its events. Attend AMWA's annual conference. The conference offers many ways in which you can contribute at the national level. At the conference, you can network with colleagues at the many open sessions, panel discussions, roundtables, and receptions. Attend the business meeting. There you can meet the association's officers and administrators and hear what the president envisions for the upcoming year. Introduce yourself to members of the EC and talk about how you might help with 1 or more of their initiatives or programs. Volunteer to serve on 1 or more national committees. Through dedicated, competent service, you will gain the recognition and experience needed to move ahead in the organization. There are many ways to become involved; some of the best and most rewarding are described here.

Help With the Annual Conference

The annual conference is a huge undertaking, and the opportunities to contribute each year are virtually limitless. Jobs range from helping to proofread the conference brochure to serving as the administrator of the annual conference. If your interest is in teaching, you can start by leading a roundtable breakfast discussion on a topic with which you are familiar. Later, increase your responsibility by leading a how-to session, co-leading an existing workshop with an experienced leader, or proposing a topic for a non-credit workshop that might evolve into part of the core or advanced curriculum.

Consider submitting a poster or serving on a discussion panel. The next year, you could increase your responsibility by chairing an open session panel or working with a more experienced member to help coordinate a session for the conference. In subsequent years, you could volunteer to

coordinate the open sessions, special interest sessions, roundtable discussions, or poster session. By then, you will know the ropes, and just as important, you will have forged long-lasting relationships with a pool of proven, capable colleagues who can help you. Take a look at the positions listed on the Willingness-to-Serve form and see what interests you. Get in touch with the annual conference administrator or appropriate session coordinator and volunteer!

Help With the AMWA Journal

Contact the administrator of publications or the *AMWA Journal* editor and volunteer to serve as a reviewer or proofreader for the Journal. The editor needs help with copyediting, reviewing manuscripts, soliciting advertising, providing oversight for specific sections of the Journal, and reporting on sessions at the annual conference or chapter meetings of interest to the general membership. Contribute an article to the Journal. Having an article published in the Journal is a great way to get your name out there, as well as to build your portfolio.

Help With a National Committee

Serving on a national committee can be another step along the pathway to the presidency. Each year, department administrators need members to work on the committees they appoint to help them achieve their goals for the year. The administrators begin their 1-year term at the business meeting at the annual conference. This is an excellent opportunity for you to meet the administrators, to inquire about their objectives, and to volunteer to assist them in reaching their goals. For example, this year you might approach the administrator of awards with an offer to help judge the book awards. Next year, you could ask to chair the Book Awards Committee. Again, as you gain experience, you will also gain perspective and widen your circle of friends and acquaintances, which will, in time, allow you to make a comfortable transition to positions of increasing responsibility. Success in committee work may lead to a position on the EC.

SERVING ON THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EC)

A key milestone on the pathway to the presidency is serving on the EC. The incoming president will select, and the BOD will approve, EC members with an established track record in AMWA who have demonstrated that they are experienced, hardworking, and responsible. If you believe you have gained enough experience and are prepared to do the work that this advanced level of volunteerism requires, tell the president-elect that you are interested in serving on the EC. Explain your credentials (eg, positions you have held, ways you have contributed) and what you have to offer. Mention other AMWA members who can attest to your dedication. Suggest concrete ways you can contribute. Be aware that there are very likely others in line for these positions. If you are not selected this year, ask the new department administrator to consider you for participation in any committees or ad hoc task forces formed during the year. With a successful track record in these positions, you may gain the trust and respect of the incumbent administrator, who may recommend you to the next president-elect. Continue to demonstrate your skills and dedication, and your turn will come.

Once you have been appointed to the EC, make the most of it! Volunteer to chair or serve on the various interdepartmental or extradepartmental ad hoc committees that are formed from time to time. Contribute during the meetings. Be proactive! Work hard and do an outstanding job. Seek to improve your department in at least 1 key way. Set aggressive yet attainable goals with the president's approval, and achieve them. Surround yourself with a committee that is smarter and more skilled than you, give them clear guidance and support, and then let them shine. Bringing highly qualified and dedicated people to the attention of the national leadership is always a good idea!

ELECTED OFFICE

During your years of service to AMWA, you will gain experience, develop new

skills, gain insight into the workings of the national organization, and connect with colleagues. In so doing, you will be recognized for excellent work, dedicated service, and competent execution of positions of increasing responsibility and complexity. Once you have proven your abilities, it may be time to consider serving as an elected officer. If this is a path you wish to take, review the requirements for the elected officers and begin to obtain any qualifications you may lack. One of the duties of AMWA headquarters is to keep track of each member's AMWA activities and to send a list of qualified members to the committees charged with awarding fellowships or with nominating officers. Once you have accrued the qualifications for the various elected offices, your name will be on that list of members to be considered. You may be surprised one day to receive a call announcing that you have been nominated for elected office.

CONCLUSION

Presidents of AMWA spend years gaining the experience, skills, and constituency needed to do their job. Those who eventually become president were actively involved at the chapter or national levels for years before they were appointed to the EC, and all are AMWA Fellows. Once appointed to the EC, they served for at least 3 years before they were eligible to become president. Most have served even longer. Being AMWA's president is among the highest of professional accomplishments in our field, and it is achieved only through hard work and unstinting dedication to the organization. Nevertheless, anyone who has been president will tell you that the effort is more than worth it. They will also tell you that AMWA has given them much more than they could ever give to AMWA.

Even if you do not currently aspire to the presidency of AMWA, there are many other reasons to become involved. Contributing to AMWA offers you multiple opportunities to shape and contribute to your profession; to weigh in on authorship, ghostwriting,

and other ethical issues; to influence the future of usage by serving on the style committee; or to advance the profession by teaching a workshop or soliciting key industry thought leaders to share their knowledge and experience with the membership.

Besides these altruistic motives for participating in AMWA, there are practical reasons to get involved. Involvement increases your visibility in the field, which is particularly valuable for freelancers. Working for AMWA is a good way to show what you know and what you can do and to prove that you are reliable, personable, easy to work with, creative, resilient—whatever your strengths, collaborating with other AMWA members gives you a chance to show them off. Working with other AMWA members will also widen and strengthen your professional network. You will have colleagues to call on when you have an editorial question, when you have a position to fill, when you are looking for a position, or when you need a recommendation. Working for AMWA also bolsters your résumé and demonstrates your expertise and commitment to the profession. Involvement in AMWA at any level offers the chance to work with people who are leaders in the field, to forge lifelong friendships, and to shape the future of AMWA and our profession. Review the Willingness-to-Serve form, chart your course, and start your journey! Sometimes the goal justifies the journey, and sometimes the journey is its own reward.

*Success is a journey, not a destination.
The doing is often more important than
the outcome.*

— Arthur R. Ashe, Jr., athlete (1943–1993)

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