

## **IABC World Conference 2015**

### **Tracie Bettenhausen's musings**

The freedom and permission to attend and further seek out professional development is the best part of serving on the IABC Great Plains board. I will never be able to fully express my thanks to the local chapter and my employer, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, for allowing me to serve on the board, attend regional meetings hosted by IABC Pacific Plains, and now to attend the IABC World Conference.

#### **Day 1**

I did not attend the Sunday evening keynote (later to learn, that was a mistake - sounds like Sally Hogshead was fascinating), so my conference started on Monday.

#### First keynote

Aaron Dignan made me feel my mind had broken into a thousand pieces and then at warp speed, come back together in a new way. He says large networks of individuals without central authority is how to be responsive, quick, current. He says the "plans" that companies put together are crap with good intentions. How can we organize ourselves so we are not spending time planning and following plans, but so that we respond and emerge? He gave examples of the immune system, the Internet, and communities of ants. (You can find Deborah Gordon's TED Talk on "the emergent genius of ant colonies" if you Google it. Here was my takeaway: ants are extremely responsive and we should study how they do it.)

Dignan says the fastest growing enterprise software now is Slack, which is built on networks, information sharing and the absence of silos.

He also gave the example of the two bullet points on all job descriptions at Valve.

1. Bring us other great people like you.
2. Go find something to do. Invest your interest like money.

He says managers should prioritize their employees being able to adapt quickly. You may lose efficiency, but will gain the ability to quickly change things up.

And a concept he brought up that has stuck with me since is this: holacracy. It's a way of running an organization so that the authority and decision making is pushed out to the very edges, away from management hierarchy. Oh snap.

#### Breakout sessions

After the first keynote, **the first breakout session** I attended was Allyson W. Neal of ConocoPhillips. She presented on how to keep your organization's website relevant in today's world of social media. She says you must always design with mobile in mind. At ConocoPhillips, Neal's team is 4-5 people handling content, with one of them also handling social media.

#### Takeaways:

1. Visual appeal is most important. Eye-popping images are what will keep people on your website. Image colors should match your web colors.
2. Simple architecture is extremely important.
3. Your top level navigation needs to be limited to five to seven tabs. Writing must be clear and short, just a headline.
4. Less graphics, more photos and video. Content maintenance is important. Be consistent.

5. Infinite scroll: dynamically created, generating like content as you keep scrolling.

Then I attended a **second breakout session**, this one featuring Chuck Gose on LinkedIn. I've never been much for LinkedIn, but Gose's insights (and what Dignan said earlier about networks) got me thinking I need to pay more attention to this social network.

Takeaways:

1. LinkedIn is about data, not numbers. Once you have 500 connections, they don't even show your number any more. Once you've had 99 people endorse you for a particular skill, they don't show that number any more. The reason being by that point, you're proven to be connected, with skills.
2. Gose recommends accepting LinkedIn connections from anyone where there could be value and not just limiting it to those you know or have met in person. He says the point is to have a network of connections, and you want to be connecting up and out.
3. What is your digital curb appeal? What do you see when you Google yourself? LinkedIn will help you build and maintain that, because the content there is trusted.

### Second keynote

Liz Wiseman was my favorite of the entire conference. "What you know is less important than how fast you can learn," she says. Don't let what you know get in the way of what you don't know.

When was the last time you felt like a rookie? What did you do at that point to succeed? Wiseman helped us understand how those processes and the qualities that brought us to them can be useful all the time. When you know enough to see a pattern, you start to fill in the blanks and assume things. That is not helpful in growing and developing new and better things. And when the leaders of an organization think they "know it all" they don't hear the feedback coming from their employees.

Wiseman cautions against being perpetually naïve, though, because that's annoying. Know how to toggle between knowledge offering clarity, and when to ask questions.

She also got into a discussion on the difference between multipliers and diminishers. Multipliers are the kind of leaders who make everyone around them smarter. Diminishers do the opposite. And there are people who are diminishers even though they have the best of intentions! I plan to buy Wiseman's books as soon as I'm finished with the novel I'm reading now.

### Breakout sessions

I then attended a very **short breakout session** on reaching employees at remote locations, and then **another** on webcasting to get your management's thinking out to employees.

## **Day 2**

### First keynote

The second day kicked off with a keynote address by Bill McDermott, CEO of SAP. The focus of his presentation was the power of storytelling and the importance of reading a room. Every attendee I spoke with really enjoyed McDermott's delivery.

### Breakout sessions

Following that, I attended a **breakout session on WalmartOne**, Walmart's extranet for employees. It's both on desktop and an app, and it's password-protected, but outside the

firewall, meant to be accessed off-the-clock. Some of the content is duplicated on the intranet, which is accessed during work.

WalmartOne has employee's paycheck information, benefits, vacation days, all of that. But it's also meant to help build Walmart's culture. It's currently only being used in the United States. Shane McLaughlin is the senior manager of Content and Social at Walmart. He says this site makes sure to show its audience "love": giving them exclusive content, and information they'll be excited about and will tell others about. They also found an employee who is good on camera, and have him do video shoutouts when employees get advanced degrees, service anniversaries, etc. Also, when they're launching a new initiative, they find a long-term employee who agrees with it, and can explain why the initiative is good and needed, and put out a short story or Q&A.

As a way to get employees to be willing to share their stories on WalmartOne, they are sure to share how many views the story gets, to show how popular it's been. It's the place where employees can share their voice.

WalmartOne sticks to four top issues for content, and it's new every day.

Following McLaughlin's session, **I attended a panel** on which McLaughlin was seated. Also on the panel were Shel Holtz and Chuck Gose. The three talked about technology's part in today's workforce.

Shel Holtz touted What'sApp as a tool to reach remote employees, such as those at plant sites. It's a quick way to share information and photos. Holtz said it's important to remember that employees will go around the IT department to find the solutions they know are out there.

Bring your own device (BYOD) is popular among salaried employees at WalMart, McLaughlin said, but it's not allowed for hourly employees because the company doesn't want employees to be on their phones. McLaughlin sees that as a lost opportunity because employees could help customers on a much more personal level if they were allowed to carry their device and point things out online.

Internal vs. external communications no longer exists thanks to the digital world. Every member of your staff is a customer, advocate and influencer. People don't care to go to a kiosk to get corporate news. They don't care to go to an app. But give them notifications and they will come. Also, several companies use Twitter for internal communications: Starbucks, Intel, etc.

At the end of day two, I attended **a session on helping employees** in times of change, presented by Dr. Laoise Murchu. People seek out connections in times of change. She brought up the CAFÉ process, in which leaders focus on positive: what are we good at and how can we do that better?

Consistent communication between managers and employees increases productivity. As part of an example, the Irish rugby team spends 30 percent of their time working on being a team.

### **Day 3**

I kicked off day three bright and early with Rhonda Sciarra of the IABC St. Louis chapter. She had the unique idea of having our region's social be an early morning walk, rather than an evening apps-and-drinks ordeal. I'm so glad we did that. We walked down to the piers and back, and it was refreshing.

**First session of the day** focused on gamification and how it can be used to engage and motivate employees. Gamification is part of most of our daily lives now: Fitbits, fantasy football, frequent flier miles, etc. (lots of Fs...) Something to chew on.

And finally, **the last session I would be able to attend**: Rapido. They had a line-up of presenters, each present for less than four minutes, on a common topic. Really a great concept. I had to leave in the middle, though, due to one of the only flights out of San Francisco bound for Bismarck that day.

I did follow the tweets of the last two sessions of the day: a panel on the Boston Marathon bombing and a session on social media with Guy Kawasaki. The Kawasaki tweets were so influential I changed my profile pics on every one of my social media applications.