

**The Toolbox- October 2006** by Dave Taylor, C.P.M., Director, NAPM-CM

*Fall Care for your Career*—Time to Weed & Feed and Kill the Grubs!

It is fall and we went past the Labor Day speed-bump. Now what will we do? Just as our September meeting is an introduction to the students of what NAPM-Central Michigan is, what it has to offer them and an opportunity for our members to see what the students have to offer us in enthusiasm, ideas and new thinking. So the fall should be a time to plan your future actions for your career. Though I may be 56 years of age, my career is not over. Some of our members are at the point they can consider retirement as an option. One of our members just sold his home and moved this past week into a condo. Others in our midst may be in job transition—considering a job change by choice or having it forced on you by layoff or company closing. Whatever your situation, we all should take time to plan ahead and make sure the foundation is strong.

Our October meeting will be in Chelsea with a plant tour of Chelsea Milling where Jiffy Mix is produced. Our speaker for the evening as promised is Mr. Rick Richard from the Detroit area, an Executive Recruiter and Head Hunter. He will be talking to us about career planning, dealing with Search Firms for your firm and also what to consider if and when you need one for yourself! Don't miss it—Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, **Working with Search Firms: Guidelines and Expectations for Applicants and Employers** - Speaker: Rick L. Richard, President & Owner, RD Worldwide and E<sup>3</sup> Staffing. Dinner and the Speaker will be at Chelsea Grill, downtown Chelsea, Mi.

I happen to work in a very competitive, market sector. Business is good, but much of our good fortune is due to flexibility, adaptability to change and a strong customer service emphasis. If we don't continually strategize for improvement and goal adjustments, we risk losing the edge-- like a skater or skier that suddenly topples over from a dull running edge. If we don't periodically look back at our track record and forward to where we are going, you can find yourself unexpectedly doubling back over your tracks like a cross country skier going around a hill only to find he is right back where he started. As a cross country skier, when you look back, you can see symmetry or erratic movement in your path behind you. It may appear straight, have a gradual arc or go back and forth from side to side as though you were lost and possibly drunk. So it is with our career-- if we just go thru the motions, we can suddenly find ourselves out of a job or out of favor with management because we have not kept pace. Or worse yet, your replacement can be suddenly working beside you, with you as the trainer. I want to retain that Rocky—"Eye of the Tiger" attitude till the very end of my career even into my retirement.

My wife works in long-term health care as does my middle son. Some residents just sit there and take up space watching time go by. My wife was telling me of one resident that is going on a 3 day conference and field-trip in a few weeks. The woman is ecstatic at the opportunity and still has most of her marbles! That's more than I can say for some people I know personally.

I have written before on career or professional development and taught seminars for that purpose. It is a large reason why I continue writing these columns in hope that I can share and impart just a hint of what I have gained along the way. One of my steel tubing representatives was asking me last week, how did you learn so much about inventory management methods to accomplish what you do? I am in amazed at what I

have been allowed and privileged to do in the inventory management over the years. Sometimes it was being in the right place when the opportunity presented itself. Other times it was the natural ability to spot patterns and discern what was happening and how to predict or forecast future usage and needs. In some cases it was a gift. But also much of my work training honed the skills I developed.

**When was the last time you took in a seminar or training opportunity?**

Afterwards, did you do any planning based on what you had learned? Maybe you set some goals or determined some milestones, benchmarks or measureables. Did you then eventually go back & review the results of applying your newfound learning? I hope you did.

In the past 12 months, our firm went from QS-9000 certified to ISO certified and just a week ago completed our surveillance audit for final TS-16949 certification. That is two years of work for most companies. We did it in one year while growing at a phenomenal rate. It is because we have set a pattern within our management for continuous improvement that is real, not just in word. We constantly seek to improve those things which seem cumbersome, lack value-add or just plain seem to be redundant without any real purpose, like some sacred cow that is tolerated or protected.

You have heard me say it before-- if I have a lifetime C.P.M. which I do, why worry or put forth the effort? Because my customers deserve it, my company deserves my best and if I am continually striving to improve my knowledge and skills, I feel better about myself and my enthusiasm shows. Just ask any of my supplier representatives. I enjoy what I do—with a passion! If I lose that, you might as well shoot me like a lame horse.

Many of you will say—but my company won't pay for the seminars or training! So—what's your point? Are you saying that if it is going to cost you something out of your pocket, it isn't worth it? What would you be willing to pay out of your pocket to go to a U of M or MSU football game? What would you pay to go to the Tigers in a world series playoff—who'd a thunk it possible even? Are you willing to take a vacation trip with spouse or a friend and spend several hundred dollars or even thousands?

I spoke with a woman today who dropped her boyfriend because he thinks only in terms of his toys--a big truck, a pull camping trailer, two large screen HDTVs in his single home. She could not compete. Is it that in your life, your professional development or well-being really doesn't rate that high? If so, you probably have less than normal life insurance and are weak on retirement planning or 401 k contributions. It all boils down to what we value the most. Is your spouse and family protected?

My mother-in-law's sister died a few weeks ago as a result of a fall in her home and a head injury. She went into a coma and never recovered. That was it—finished, gone for good.

My sister died a year ago at age 60. It really shook me up. That meant I was the only one left of the immediate family. So I have been taking stock of where my wife and I are at this juncture in our life. I want to enjoy her company and have her enjoy mine for a long time to come. I also have thought a lot about my sons and my relationship to them. I've thought about what I want to accomplish yet in my career and my life.

I have several hobbies. You already know of my one passion- photography. For my wife, she enjoys a good book. As a former bookstore manager, I can equally enjoy a trip to the bookstore helping her find her next book. I like to shop with her. A couple

years ago we started visiting Michigan lighthouses. A few weeks ago, we added three more to our list of ones we had visited and I had photographed.

I implore each of you to look at what you do each day. What do you like best? What are some of the biggest hindrances to achieving your goals at work or completing the tasks assigned you? Today I met with my boss to finalize print-outs or reports they are willing to reprogram, modify or make more user-friendly so I can be more effective. They agreed with my suggested changes to the reports as sorely needed. Next step is to meet with our IT sub-contractor and see what will be involved to determine the priority for what gets done first. Change does occur where I work, so we are 70% done with the project now. It is already approved by our owner and president, today's meeting just finalized what reports were to be involved. That is a neat commitment to have from your management, to know the changes will be done, since the empowerment has been given to make those changes.

So it can be with your self improvement or professional development. Just when I thought I had plateaued in computer learning, my youngest son pushed me to get networked at home. Now we are and it does make sense and feels natural as though I should have done it some time ago. I was just afraid to take the first step. So it is with you. Commit to attending more dinner meetings, satellite seminars and other opportunities as they present themselves this year. You will be the winner in the end. Enjoy the weeding and feeding your career. You might even have an infestation of grubs or the crabbies! Find out at our October dinner if you have the right mind-set. Several times during my career, search firms have helped guide me to new positions and re-invent myself. You too might just find the right miracle grow mixture through it. dt