

## XIV. 2004 LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

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### Comments on Receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award

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It was a thrill and an honor to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award in January 2005. Having Gladys and our family members present added to the joy of the occasion. It was good to receive the award from President Marlene Heyser, who, with her aides Bonnie Castrey and Bruce Kauffman, put together such an outstanding program.

Unfortunately, although the attendance was good, it was not great. Marlene has passed the leadership torch to Steve Sleight, and we expect that he will also do a top-notch job. But, in light of our decline in membership, will his meetings draw the crowd that they deserve? Essentially, we have a great product, but it is not selling as well as it should.

Among the problems are the historic perception differences that exist between the national organization and the chapters. Too often, we hear chapter people say that they do not attend national meetings because these sessions are dominated by academics with narrow concerns and quantitative economics. A look at the annual program listings makes clear that this is simply not the case. One solution here, as always, has been to find ways to get the actual program in the hands of chapter members.

A second issue involves the perceptions of human resource personnel. Their prime organization is the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). We suspect that they often ignore our offerings because they believe we are strictly labor-union oriented. True, our roots include collective bargaining and labor relations, but we have always had a major interest

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in human resources, née personnel administration. The meaningful fact is that many of the concerns of both groups (labor and human resources), are overlapping. For example, we examine the role and impact of the North American Free Trade Association and have an interest section that reports on such matters annually. Both groups have interest in their findings.

Following is an ad hominem story, but it makes a point about the need for us to find more ways for us to understand each other. I talked with a labor-relations official at one of America's largest companies, which has both organized and nonorganized units. He reports to a human resources executive. The labor-relations officer was involved in a difficult collective bargaining negotiation and called in a mediator. He was chastised by his human-resource supervisor for not resolving the problem on his own. That human-resource individual could benefit from some background training in the nature of labor relations.

I recognize the sensitivities involved in labor and human resource personnel meeting with each other. Frequently, one emphasis for human-resource personnel is keeping the union out. As I indicated above, I believe we still have many areas of common concern. Another example is approaches to reducing absenteeism. Also, there are broader subjects that are addressed solely in courts and before labor boards. An illustration is the use of card checks to determine representation status. A meeting panel presenting the respective positions of the two groups on this subject could be of interest to both groups and others. Our biennial public policy explorations are another area of mutual interest.

My conclusion is that LERA and SHRM have room for some useful interaction. Our new tripartite Industry Councils should also be a powerful incentive for the two groups to consider working together. The fact that membership and meeting attendance might benefit are useful byproducts.

There is a third idea that I believe warrants consideration as we seek to increase membership and have better attended meetings. LERA is exploring an alternative midyear meeting arrangement that involves working with the biennial National Labor-Management Conference organized by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. My suggestion is that we may wish to consider regional LERA conferences on a trial basis during some of those alternative years.

We could divide the United States into a number of regions, perhaps six or eight. The chapters in the region would be encouraged and given support to run one- or two-day meetings for their area during the year. I am aware that we hear from a large number of organizations that seek to attract us to their meetings, but the meetings that include regional concerns and permit travel to be less onerous and costly might be a good substitute, at least at

times, for existing arrangements. The National Academy of Arbitrators is studying application of the regional concept to its midyear meeting.

LERA has had some limited experience with the regional approach, for example in the Northwest. It has also, at time, involved joint efforts with other groups. I believe the idea warrants discussion at both the national and chapter levels.

I have had one potential discomfort upon receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award. Does this mean that it is all over and it is time to walk away and retire? I hope the suggestions above help make the case that so long as you believe you can contribute and wish to do so, go ahead. I will try to keep an eye out for the subjectivity involved in that consideration.

One final thought on lifetime achievement. One individual who has given greatly of himself to LERA and the labor and employment field is George Strauss. There are an overwhelming number of his former students who would so testify. I hope he will be considered near term for a Lifetime Achievement Award.