

## How To Attend a Conference (—The ASCD Tenth Annual Conference, That Is!)

SINCE OUR American culture has plunged headlong into the "how-to-do-it" era it seems appropriate that this editorial for the conference orientation issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP be written in a "how-to-do-it" vein. Undoubtedly you have seen Adler's *How to Read a Book* and Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Perhaps as a consequence you've now even read a book and have a few friends (although there seems to be a certain amount of evidence from contemporary sociology that these two things do not mix well). Have you given any thought, however, to the matter of how to attend a conference? Wait! Don't go away yet, even if your first impulse was to answer this query with a "I must know something about attending conferences. I certainly get to enough of them every year."

First, let's make sure that we're talking about ASCD conferences, for we feel—and we hope you do, too—that they're not "just another conference." Let's be sure, too, that you keep in mind the fact that ASCD has tried to keep an experimental frame of mind towards its conference structure so that each year significant variations are planned—variations which you should know about if you are to get full benefit from them.

Second, don't dismiss too lightly this matter of how to attend a conference. Whether you or the school system or institution you represent pays the bill for a week's trip to Chicago, the out-

lay of cash is considerable. Add to this sum an amount representing your salary for the week's time involved and the cost rises sharply. Now add the cost to ASCD of about \$10.00 for each conference participant and the considerable cost in time, energy and materials involved in the fine cooperation of between 300 and 400 members of the 21 committees from the conference area working on various facets of the program. One need not get involved in any higher mathematics to realize that participation in the conference, therefore, involves a substantial investment for you, your institution, the Association, and our profession. The point of all this is not to suggest that everyone stay home this year, but rather to urge that we approach the matter of conference attendance with a mature thoughtfulness.

The problem has implications, of course, for both the individual conference participant and for those within the Association who have special responsibilities for planning the program. For you, a satisfactory answer must be gained to the questions, "What can I get out of this meeting that will be of help to the school or institution which I represent and to me as a person?", and, "What can I contribute to my professional colleagues through such participation?" For those planning the conference, it means moving away from a conference justified largely in terms of "always having an annual

meeting about this time of year" and towards planning which involves the combination of research, social engineering, and effective communication in a way which will strike the spark that will culminate in a significant, rewarding educational experience for many who attend.

By now you have probably decided that the writer fully subscribes to the old but not yet dead concept of learning which holds that "it's got to hurt to be educational." You may have decided that what has been said so far implies that anyone who enjoys himself at an ASCD conference is likely to be "cheating" on his school board or trustees. If we have given this impression, we are indeed sorry, for nothing is further from the truth. The opportunity to make new friends and renew old friendships is indeed a significant aspect of the ASCD conference experience.

But let's begin at the beginning, and in this case "beginning" means not the first day of the conference but a date perhaps several months prior to this, when you are at the point of making your decision about attending the ASCD meeting. (Since there is now only one month until conference time, I suggest that you work twice as fast on the following elements of your obligation as a conference-goer this year and keep the suggestions in mind for a more leisurely pace next year.)

STEP ONE in how to attend an ASCD conference is to preregister. A preregistration blank is mailed to all members twice in the several months prior to the conference. Along with this goes preliminary information about the program and conference schedule.

Registering by mail is helpful in many ways to you, to the Washington staff of the ASCD, and to the leadership personnel of the study-discussion group in which you will be working. Mail registration in advance of the conference means that instead of standing in a long line and using precious conference time for it, you will be able to exchange your registration receipt for the necessary materials in a matter of a minute or two and be on your way. Advance registration means also that you have a much better chance of being assigned to the study-discussion group of your choice. Mailing your registration in advance of the conference helps the ASCD staff, too, since it is obviously much easier to handle a thousand registrations over a period of three or four weeks than in a matter of a few hours. We want very much to give you a conference assignment that matches your interests and needs and this can be done much better when you register in advance. Preregistration is a further benefit to the study group leader of the group in which you work and, for that matter, to all of the other members of that group. Copies of the completed preconference registration forms are mailed periodically to the group leaders. The information thus obtained about group members already assigned makes possible considerable planning in advance of the conference. With only nine or ten hours available to the study-discussion groups in Chicago any preliminary planning done before arrival is very helpful.

Also, the fact that the group leader has your name, along with those of other members preregistered, means that he may correspond with you and

get a further indication of your interests and special talents. We were disappointed to discover on November 1 that more than twice the number of persons then preregistered for the conference had already reserved hotel rooms for their use. Obviously, adequate housing is an important matter to you. We think, however, that at least as important, and in many ways more important, is an early assignment to a study group of your choice. If you have not already preregistered, *do it today*, and take step number one in how to attend an ASCD conference. The deadline for advance registration is February 25, so don't delay.

STEP TWO relates to your personal orientation for conference participation. Sure, we're prejudiced, but we feel it's important for you to read this article and the others which make up this issue of *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP*, the issue devoted to an exploration of some of the major facets of our conference theme, "Crucial Problems of Today's Schools." The authors of these articles have been asked to identify some of the basic issues in each of the problem areas which parallel the topics of the assembly meetings scheduled for Monday evening, March 7. Neither the articles nor the assembly meetings are intended to give you "the answers" in these crucial problem areas. They are intended rather to stimulate your thinking about the problem and to help us all get a better perspective in relation to it.

STEP THREE comes along at just about the same time as the previous one, perhaps one month before the conference. At this time you will receive your copy of the conference pro-

gram with a listing of all the meetings with their time schedules, participants, etc. We especially urge you to check the section listing the clinic sessions scheduled for Sunday afternoon and Wednesday and select the one which you plan to attend. After making this selection note the name of the clinic chairman and after thinking the matter over carefully write to him regarding the specific job problems which you have in the area to be covered by the clinic. Your suggestions, along with those received from many others planning to attend this clinic, will enable the chairman and resource panel participants to give you much more specific help at the time of the meeting than they could otherwise be expected to do.

STEP FOUR, also based on receipt of the conference program, is to read through the accompanying brochure listing available individual school visits and trips to community points of educational interest. The listing this year is more extensive than ever before with many opportunities for school visits available for the Friday preceding and the Friday following the conference. Twenty-four interesting trips to community points of interest are planned for various times between Friday, March 4, and Friday, March 11. Along with this brochure you will find a reply card which will make it easy for you to indicate your choice of school visits and trips to points of community interest. Please forward this information to the local committee so they may make final arrangements for your trip or visit. *This card must reach the committee by February 25, so act promptly.* Further information regarding the

trips and specific instructions on transportation, etc., may be obtained at the trips and school visits booth in the registration area at the conference.

If you and enough of your colleagues have followed step one and preregistered, you will now be in a position to take STEP FIVE, that of corresponding with your study group leader about your special interests and concerns relating to the group topic and also about the resources in experience and materials which you can bring to the group. It would, of course, be essential to keep all such plans sufficiently flexible so that they might be reviewed and modified or completely rejected by the group at the time of its first session. Such preplanning, however, will be of material assistance in making more efficient use of the limited time available to the study-discussion groups.

"For goodness sake, get us to the conference!" you are probably growling impatiently. That's STEP SIX, and one which could possibly be a sloshy and chilly one—if you know Chicago in March. So you have arrived in Chicago with a suitcase, a wool muffler, overshoes and, of course, your registration receipt for the conference. Your first logical move will be to proceed to the Hotel Conrad Hilton and check into the room you have reserved. Let's hope that you are arriving at the time you originally indicated to the hotel or, if not, that you sent along a notice of the change, in order that a room is available for you. If you've come a day or several days early, there will be many things to do—meetings of associated groups to attend, school visits, trips to community points of interest, etc. If you've arrived on Sat-

urday evening between 6 and 8 P.M., there is still time to check in at the registration area and complete your registration. This may also be done on Sunday morning and afternoon.

Since you're likely to grow busier as the conference days pass, we suggest that you plan on taking a substantial period of time following completion of your registration to view the fine exhibit of instructional materials and curriculum bulletins. Because so much of the effectiveness of the curriculum workers' efforts depends upon adequate support and reinforcement from the instructional materials which are used, it seems especially important that all who attend the conference study these materials carefully and talk with representatives of the various firms that have produced them. Many of these representatives are experienced educators in their own right and have much to offer in the way of counsel on instructional problems. They need your help, too, in order that their materials may properly reflect the point of view you are attempting to implement. Available in the curriculum bulletins exhibit will be a complete annotated listing of all of the materials displayed that will be most helpful for your future reference as you seek to obtain some of these materials for your own use. Additional special times for reviewing the fine exhibit of materials have been set aside on Monday and Tuesday afternoons from 4:00 to 6:00 P.M. You are, of course, encouraged to view these exhibits at whatever times you find free. Study-discussion groups, too, may want to take some portion of their time to examine materials especially relevant to their topic.

Before the full impact of the conference's busy pace is felt, you would be wise to consider as STEP SEVEN a clarification of your understanding of the difference in expectation you hold for each of the major types of conference meetings: general sessions, assemblies, clinic sessions, and study-discussion groups. Each has an important part to play, we feel, in the cumulative benefit of the conference to you. Each, however, performs its portion of the total job in a somewhat different fashion. Unless your expectations are shaped accordingly, you may find yourself confused regarding what you may expect to get out of these sessions and what you can do to benefit most. The general sessions, of course, are fundamentally speaker-listener situations in which one person known for his artistry in verbal communication with large groups, as well as for his competence in the field under discussion, takes a period of thirty to forty minutes to paint the kind of word picture that will stimulate his total conference audience to further thought and action on the subject. The full benefits of such sessions come as the listeners are able to place themselves in the role of the speaker and, for the moment at least, accept the premises which he has established for the purpose of fully comprehending this point of view before seeking to test its validity in terms of personal experience. As someone pointed out after the Alice Keliher talk in Los Angeles last year, an inspiring address such as that which Miss Keliher made "... gives one the feeling of having been to educational church."

The assembly meetings suggest an-

other type of experience. In one sense they are similar to the general sessions, but they deal with a somewhat more specialized aspect of the total conference theme. They are different from the general sessions in the sense that each will involve a panel of four or more participants rather than one speaker. Their function, as we mentioned earlier, is to raise issues and point up crucial aspects of the problem under discussion. They are not answer-giving or answer-getting sessions primarily; neither are they sessions which will actively involve in discussion persons other than the panel.

The clinic sessions are quite a different matter. Most of these have been set up so as to reflect a division of the conference population along job level lines. They are intended to provide an opportunity for persons working at the same job to consider together very specific aspects of that job and gain the counsel of a group of experienced and especially competent persons who likewise work in this field. The success of the clinic sessions depends upon your willingness as a participant to raise the "honest-to-goodness" problems you face in your daily work, whether they sound sophisticated or simple. Their success depends, too, upon the willingness of the clinic panel to respond to these questions freely and from the point of view of their own personal experience, with full recognition that the group in attendance will not assume universality for any specific experiences they recount. The clinics are not occasions for speech-making, either on the part of those attending or on the part of the resource panel. They are rather places for the specific raising of job-

centered questions and the frank answering of these questions in the light of the best experience of the resource panel, supplemented by other members of the group.

The fourth major type of meeting in the ASCD conference is, of course, the study-discussion group. These sessions have been organized around a number of quite specific and, we hope, reasonably manageable topics. The meetings will bring together groups of between 20 and 30 educators and lay citizens representing many geographic regions, many levels of experience, and many points of view, but representing also a commonly expressed interest in the topic for discussion. The groups will use methods of informal group discussion to pursue their interests. Each member has an important opportunity and an equally important responsibility in the assumption of an active role in the group's discussion. Again, this is not the place for speeches, not even by the illustrious names of the prolific authors you may find sitting next to you, or by the individuals specially invited as resource persons. This is not to suggest that the effectiveness of group discussion depends upon the equal division of speaking time among all members. Obviously, some persons will have important contributions to make that may take more time than others.

We urge that you give careful attention to the special section of the conference program titled "Your Discussion Group—How To Make It Click." In this section you will find a number of practical suggestions for ways in which you as a participant, along with the leadership team, may help the

group realize its objectives. We urge, too, that all of the group members keep an experimental attitude regarding the organization and operation of their group discussion. It is all too easy to type such discussions in a neat and rigid pattern and fail to recognize that different problems or different aspects of the same problem require widely differing approaches. If certain objectives call for rather extensive remarks by one person, why not establish a group pattern that will provide for this? If, on the other hand, 20 or 25 persons are too many to effectively handle another portion of the problem, why not subdivide these groups into subgroups of six or seven?

Twenty-five of the study-discussion groups will be utilizing a field observation situation on Tuesday morning and afternoon. A careful survey of schools and school systems was made in Chicago and the surrounding area to identify those carrying on programs which paralleled the topics of some of our groups and which contained elements of special interest to the group. It is important that the study groups utilizing such situations recognize that they cannot expect to get "the answers" from these observations. They should rather expect to build a common base of experience within their discussion group upon which conversation can then proceed.

There is no place for the drifter in these sessions. Effective group discussion depends upon a reasonable acquaintance and a relaxed working relationship among group members. We ask, therefore, that each person remain in the group to which he has been assigned and that the leadership per-

sonnel in each group politely but firmly keep out persons not registered for that group.

We wish we had space to go through the conference program in chronological order and point out in detail each of the opportunities which awaits you. Since this is impossible, we want now to call your attention to three or four other experiences which are important to your understanding of how to attend an ASCD conference. One of these is the social hour scheduled for Sunday afternoon, 4:30 to 6:00 P.M. This will probably be the best chance you will have at any time during the week for seeing a large number of your old friends and meeting many persons you have wanted to meet. Be sure you are there in full uniform (name badge clearly visible) and keep moving. After all, if you are going to see 2,000 people in an hour and a half, you've got to travel!

Another series of meetings we want to emphasize are the regional luncheons scheduled for Wednesday noon. There are some things which a national organization can do better than state, regional or local groups because of its wider base of membership and its greater resources. Most changes in specific instructional practices, however, are effected at the local, state or regional levels. The extent to which good ideas uncovered in ASCD national conferences are translated into action will depend in large measure upon the channels of communication

and cooperative effort which are established among the ASCD members in their own "neighborhoods." If you want to do more than talk about some of these crucial problems, therefore, plan to attend your regional luncheon on Wednesday and make sure that you visit with other persons from your state and your own locality. You need their help and they need yours.

Two other important conference meetings are closely related. One, the report of the resolutions committee meeting on Wednesday afternoon, 4:45 to 5:15; and the other, the annual business meeting of the Association on Thursday morning from 9:00 until noon. At the former, the chairman of ASCD's Resolutions Committee will read each of the resolutions which has been submitted to him up to that point and will call for the presentation of additional statements from the floor. This will be a time for the introduction and clarification of resolutions only. Their debate and passage or rejection will be a major portion of the Thursday morning business meeting.

And finally the annual Association luncheon and closing general session. Here is your opportunity to cap the climax of what we sincerely hope will be a long and fondly remembered experience at ASCD's 1955 conference.

See you in Chicago!

—GEORGE W. DENEMARK, *executive secretary, ASCD, and editor, Educational Leadership.*

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