

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)
Transcription

Interview of: Kent Peterson

Date of Interview: January 23, 2010

Interviewed by: Don Rich

Note: Interviewer is hard to understand at times. These spots are noted as (unintelligible).

Don Rich

Today is Saturday, January, 23, 2010. I'm Don Rich, a member of the ASHRAE Historical Committee and I'm pleased to have Kent Peterson with me here today. Kent is a life member and a Fellow of ASHRAE and served as ASHRAE president in 2007-2008. Good afternoon Kent. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of ASHRAE's Leadership Recall program.

Kent Peterson

Good afternoon Don.

D.R.

Good afternoon Kent. I noticed that you're a consulting engineer. Tell us a little bit about how you got into that.

K.P.

I was fortunate enough Don, to early on in my high school years, which was in my junior year of high school, to actually come across a consulting engineer that was a friend of the family. He had an electrical consulting engineering firm and I took on the job of being a draftsman and doing the bookkeeping for the firm. And after about a year working for that firm the firm decided they were going to move and I decided I wanted to actually do things that were more hands on and wanted references from mechanical engineering firms. At that point in time I actually went out and interviewed with several mechanical engineering firms. And I happened to come across a firm by the name of Sosoka and Associates and John Sosoka was the proprietor of that firm. John Sosoka, right away in that interview, it was before my eighteenth birthday, we hit it off very well. And he hired me at that point as a draftsman and to do his bookkeeping for his consulting engineering firm and I would say that John has been by far my mentor in this industry. He taught me everything. Sky was the limit. It didn't matter whether I'd taken the courses in college yet. Anything that I could actually undertake, he would actually show me how to do that if I felt comfortable doing it. And that's how I felt, fell into the HVAC industry.

D.R.

It helps to have a mentor, doesn't it?

K.P.

Tremendous help to have a mentor. You know to go a little bit further about, you know, John's mentoring to me, one of the early things when I was only a junior in college was he said, Kent, he came to me and he said Kent, he says, you need to be an ASHRAE member. And he says you not only have to be an ASHRAE member but I expect you to actually participate in the Society meetings, I expect you to

go to the technical committees, and really understand and give back to the industry because the only way we can make the industry better is to give back to the industry. And that lesson was really a life lesson for me.

D.R.

You mentioned your education. Tell me a little about your education?

K.P.

I have a Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering from California State University, Long Beach. And of course, I worked the entire time I was getting my bachelor's. I worked in the consulting engineering field for John Sosoka and it made it so much easier to go through school, taking the thermal classes and the heat transfer classes and the fuel dynamic classes, already understanding some of the principles within the HVAC industry. And that I think I was blessed by having John Sosoka actually come into my life.

D.R.

How did you happen to pick engineering?

K.P.

Well, engineering runs deep in my family. You know if I go back, you know, a couple of generations I could actually say that what you're going to find is farmers who actually were hands on with mechanical equipment. They really knew things. I was actually born in the Midwest in Wichita, Kansas. I come from a farming family and a family that actually owned a filling station that had a bunch of mechanics and I think, you know my father was a, he had a degree in both mathematics and physics. He worked in the aerospace industry as an engineer. And I have three other brothers, an identical twin brother, which I'll probably talk about in this interview, who's also an engineer. Three of the four of us ended up becoming engineers primarily because our father taught us everything we needed to know to be good engineers. I mean we were extremely hands on and repairing automobiles, working on things, understanding how things operated, how to make them better. And that was kind of our upbringing within the family.

D.R.

I noticed looking through your ASHRAE Bio that you've been involved in quite a few HVAC projects. (unintelligible) Tell me about some of those that stand out.

K.P.

Well I'm always striving to do innovative things in the HVAC industry. I mean trying to improve things and, you know, if I go back to my early career days working for John Sosoka I think some of, you know, right when direct digital control started to come out in the HVAC industry and maybe even prior to the HVAC direct digital controls where there was actually industrial controls. We were starting to apply a lot of these algorithms and doing the programming and trying to get more sophisticated algorithms that could automatically control the HVAC systems. And that got me excited. I mean I actually joined the TC 1.4 Control Theory and Applications. I felt like I was, you know, the youngest guy by far in that committee. I think I actually joined it even prior to me graduating from college and working, you know, with such industry giants like Roger Haines and other people that were on that committee and what they did was they accepted me for the fact that I understood the new technology that actually existed. They understood the HVAC portion of that and I think that's the greatness of ASHRAE is that within our technical committee structure that we can share this information. And not only could I grow but I could

actually share the knowledge that I had with what these new tools were actually going to provide in the industry.

D.R.

What other TCs did you participate in?

K.P.

I was also on TC 1.2 which is Measurement and Verification. And that was my first exposure into the standards and guidelines for all of our measurement and tests standards within the industry. The two went kind of hand in hand. Those were my TC experiences. I also worked on SPC 13, which, actually sorry GPC 13, which is a guideline on specifying direct digital control systems.

D.R.

I kind of gather that you'd certainly recommend a young engineer to go into ASHRAE and get involved right away on a technical committee?

K.P.

It's never too early in my opinion. I mean if you have experience in this industry and you're working in the industry even if you're going to school, I think that there's benefit even as a senior in college to start to get involved and sit in those TC meetings and start to understand who some of the giants are in the industry and starting to network with those people and everyone has something to give. That's the nice thing about ASHRAE, is they always seem to accept everyone in the fact that there is something beneficial coming out of every individual person that's actually working within ASHRAE towards some common goal. And I think that's the benefit of this organization to everyone. It's definitely going to help your career.

D.R.

Noticed that you published quite a few papers. How did that come about? How did you get encouraged to do that?

K.P.

Well some of that also was with John Sosoka. I mean, you know, my mentor and within ASHRAE, it was very important to be active and involved and being able to share the experiences that I was having within the industry with some of the new technologies and share how that might help move the industry forward by publishing these papers. So there were symposium papers and then obviously later in my career starting to become president publishing quite a bit of documentation relative to more higher level type, where the industry really could go. The vision that I actually had for where the industry really could go with the technology and the development that was occurring out there.

D.R.

What would you say, Kent, is your most important contribution to the industry?

K.P.

Well Don, I hope I'm not done contributing. But to date, I would say that my best contribution to the industry by far has been the ability to get others to work together and contribute and reach common goals for the, not only ASHRAE, but I think for the entire built environment that happens to be out there in the entire globe. I do have a gift to actually get people to work together, to understand a common vision and to see what the overall plan is for, I think, moving our industry forward.

D.R.

That's leadership skills. (unintelligible)

K.P.

I think it's leadership skills. I've been able to take advantage of and leadership skills that I gained from my experience through ASHRAE. All the years that I've spent within this organization and being around all the greats that were in the organization. I mean everyone has shared little pieces of them with me over the years and that's what's made me better.

D.R.

Kent, your presidential theme "Greater Efficiency Today Blue Skys Tomorrow." How did you happen to (unintelligible).

K.P.

I've always been a big proponent of energy efficiency in the built environment and in my entire career of knowing that as an industry we can continually do better. And I think the theme really came to me when I started to consider some of the possibilities that were out there. The possibilities existed that we really could substantially improve the built environment from an energy efficiency standpoint. And have a remarkable impact on not only global emissions but the energy that's being used within the world. And that's when the theme really came to my mind. So that the theme, you know, Greater Efficiency Today, was the fact that the possibilities existed today. And we really needed to grab those possibilities and start to use them. Blue Skys Tomorrow really came out of the thought that when I was in Asia traveling they had not very many blue skies. They started counting their blue skies due to the actual emissions that were occurring and they were getting a lot of pollution. And I started to really understand how precious blue skies are. And so the second part of that theme to have blue skies tomorrow, is if we can act today and use the technology that there is today and available to us and use the knowledge we have to really push the industry forward, we will see blue skies tomorrow.

D.R.

That's a good message. What do you think the biggest challenge is focusing in the HVAC industry?

K.P.

I think some of the larger challenges that face the HVAC industry today is obviously there's a continuing demand on us to figure out how to design and construct buildings that are going to be more energy efficient and it's not just on the HVAC technology itself but on our industry, meaning ASHRAE. They're expecting us to figure out how to make the building envelopes better. How to use mix mode type operation where sometimes it's passive technologies combined with active technologies in order to reduce the amount of energy that's moving there. The trend today is definitely in many areas to move towards net zero energy buildings. And if we're going to move towards net zero energy buildings it's going to take an extreme amount of innovation within the industry to figure out the best technologies to apply, where to apply them and obviously that's different in different climate zones. So you know, I see, you know, many factors actually facing us. The other, beyond energy is really the sustainability practices that are starting to come out. And certainly, you know, things like looking at Standard 189, the High Performance in Building standard that's just been published, really starts, you know to me that's a game changer in the industry. It's a game changer just like standard 90 was back in 1975. You know where we started to finally have energy efficiency requirements for buildings. Now we're having green building requirements for buildings. So it goes well beyond just the energy efficiency. We're now talking about water efficiency and sustainable sites and the materials and resources and good indoor environmental quality and then turning over buildings that not only operate efficiently when the contractor built it and

turned it over but how can we give it to the owner so they continue to operate it efficiently or make it more efficient as they start to move forward.

D.R.

These challenges affecting worldwide do you think?

K.P.

Absolutely worldwide. Even at this meeting, I've only been here for a couple days so far, and I've run into people from all other countries that say these are these are extremely important issues. In some countries, you know, it may be that the water efficiency issues are more important than the energy efficiency but all of these issues as the world population continues to grow, we're seeing more and more demand on the building industry to respond and reduce the amount of natural resources that are being consumed by the buildings whether it be in construction or the operation.

D.R.

I understand that you have spoken often of the dreams of ASHRAE. (unintelligible) Could you tell us about that?

K.P.

Well, yes Don. On a higher level basis for ASHRAE my dream has always been that we are able to harness the resources of the strong membership that we have, the technical resources, the brilliant minds that are within this organization, and move them all in the same direction for the better good of the entire world. And you know, there's so many things that we can do and we can do great. And I think it really takes, you know, strong leadership in order to push everyone in the same direction. And use of brilliant minds to start to really understand how we can improve our industry whether it happens to be, you know, reducing energy efficiency whether it happens to be coming up with the latest technology in manufacturing for some of the HVAC components or even harnessing the sun for HVAC for that matter. There's a lot of challenges that are out there today and I truly believe that, I mean the brilliant minds that exist within this organization, I mean it's unbelievable when you look across the membership of ASHRAE, across the world, and just to understand how much knowledge really exists in those minds. And the fact that they are willing to come together and share that knowledge and not feel like it's proprietary to them in order to move the industry forward. And if we can continue to do that and continue to have a vision of where we need to move to in the industry, I think this organization is one of the best in the world.

D.R.

Kent, before we close, is there any advice that you might give to a young engineer who's starting out in our industry?

K.P.

Absolutely.

D.R.

Not necessarily in our industry.

K.P.

Just any engineering student that happens to be out there. We have to grasp the opportunities that are before us. And many times, I guess I was fortunate to actually have those opportunities come to me. Never once did I ever have the idea that I would be the president of ASHRAE. ASHRAE, every time that I was asked to serve on a committee I always looked at as an opportunity. Sometimes scary. I mean

sometimes I didn't feel prepared to take that opportunity but it actually caused me that beating that fear caused me to actually go out and research how I can do this job better or if I went on the planning committee, I mean what are planning strategies? How do you go about these type processes? And this is what actually grows us, not only professionally but personally as individuals. And I think it's those type of people that we really want to be the future leaders within this industry, within the engineering industry in general. Take the opportunity. Use the people that are out there that are offering to mentor you. There's so much that we can do if we can actually work together to do it. We don't want to do it by ourselves.

D.R.

Thanks very much Kent for the interview today and I appreciate you sharing your views and visions and recollections.

K.P.

Well thank you Don. You know, in closing I would probably have to say that I really thank everyone that has touched my life in this organization. It's been unbelievable on every, I mean people may just talk to me for five minutes in the corridor but I take those little pieces of information and it makes me grow. And that that to me, has been really the strength of this organization and what I've got out of ASHRAE.