



**MEMBER VALUE LEADERSHIP SUMMIT GENERATES BOTH HEAT AND LIGHT  
Café Sessions Engage Member Leaders in Dialogue on the Future Shape of ASQ**

*Pushing a Rock Over the Top of the Hill*

“Why did we wait so long to have this conversation?”

By John Ryan

When Lucy Stange, chair of the ASQ Toronto Section, packed her bags to come to the ASQ Member Value Leadership Summit, she brought along her belief that ASQ does not offer much to the pharmaceutical industry in which she works. She came to the summit to find out ways in which ASQ can provide—and is willing to provide—something of value for members in this industry.

Alain Gaumier, education chair of the Tampa Section, says, “I came here hoping to see the organization challenge itself with some out-of-the-box thinking” on issues like declining membership. He’s interested to see if the organization is up to the task. And

he's wondering which will predominate—the traditional ways or change. He mentioned that when he joined ASQ many years ago his first impression was that the organization and its member units could be pretty set in their ways.

Vick Mehta looks on the summit as a good learning opportunity. "I see it as a great way to incorporate the voice of the customer in ASQ operations," he says. Mehta, certification coordinator for the Edmonton Section, works for Vetco Gray Canada, a manufacturer of oil field equipment.

Scott Rutherford, Deputy Regional Director of Region 11, came wanting to know if ASQ is really ready to change. "We're facing a life-or-death situation. There has to be fundamental change in the Society." He says he'll know very soon if that's going to happen, and he thinks one way to judge that is by the level of excitement the summit generates. "The people in this room are at their best when they're getting other people excited about something," he noted.

These individuals and 175 others came to the Milwaukee event October 16-18, 2005, from all across North America with varying expectations, with a multitude of ideas on member value, and with plenty of opinions on what is right and wrong with ASQ. But they all have one thing in common: a visceral passion for quality that has driven them to assume leadership positions in ASQ. How else could anyone explain why so many of them put so much of themselves into it? They have a love for the organization that goes beyond dedication, and they're looking for ways they can make ASQ a home for others who share their passion for quality.

The "Blueprint for Community" Member Value Leadership Summit was designed as a way to tap into those hopes and dreams through intensive cross-fertilization of ideas using a method known as café dialogues (see sidebar).



## Quick Hits: A Few General Observations

From the rotating cafes and group dialogues, some transformations became apparent:

- Over the course of the two-plus days, a somewhat disjointed group began to meld into a more cohesive community. A community committed to some specific actions aimed at enhancing member value and pointed in the same general direction toward a shared vision of the future.
- The café and dialogue format for the summit resulted in a high level of energy and engagement on the part of the participants; everyone had a role and every participant made significant contributions.
- There were some eye-openers and new understandings among the various members of the ASQ family about how each relates—and fails to relate—to the others. Most obvious were the examples of lapses in communication and failure of integration among Sections, Divisions, headquarters staff, and the Board. The general reaction was, “This doesn’t have to be. We can change it, and we can change it now.”
- There were revelations about what ASQ is as an organization and what it wants to be.
- There developed a shared realization that what we are is what we collectively know. And following from that, a further realization that developing and disseminating the collective Body of Knowledge constitutes a very important key to the Society’s future. Not surprisingly, therefore, many of the specific proposals for enhancing member value fell under the umbrella of education and training.
- There was explicit affirmation that the ASQ vision is solid. It does indeed represent an appropriate statement for how ASQ views its place in the world.
- Participants made a commitment to get to know each other better and work together more effectively.
- Remaking the organization became a higher priority for participants than designing new programs or initiatives to carry the existing organization forward. A year from now, even if the ASQ organization doesn’t look a lot different, it will FEEL vastly different. (It’s not the specific activities that matter as much as the way we act.)
- The summit succeeded in raising the overall level of hopefulness about ASQ’s future among member leaders.

At the close of the summit, Jerry Mairani thanked and congratulated the participants for what was accomplished. “Things are going to roll out of here that we can’t stop,” he promised. “We took some risks, we’ve pushed the rock over the top of the hill, and it’s gaining momentum.”

## **What is Café Dialogue?**

Quality cafés are modeled after European “café society” — friends, colleagues, and traveling strangers collectively engaged in lively, small group conversations about compelling issues. The café process encourages effective questions, candid dialogue, and creative thinking among groups in a safe, welcoming atmosphere. The process of having everyone engage in dialogue at several different tables while transcribing onto the tabletop the thoughts that emerge, followed by full group sharing, creates meaningful connections and a flow of knowledge and participation that enriches the collective pool of wisdom around the café theme.

### ***Discussion vs Dialogue***

The intent of discussion is usually to convince or persuade others that each person’s point of view is the “right” one. Discussion often leads to divisiveness or even hostility in groups, as people rigidly retain and defend their point of view.

Dialogue asks people to suspend their attachment to a particular point of view so that deeper levels of listening, synthesis, and meaning can evolve within a group. The result is an entirely different atmosphere. Instead of everyone trying to figure out who is right and who is wrong, the group is involved in trying to find deeper meaning through the synergy of all points of view. Individual differences are acknowledged and respected. Dialogue informs and builds alignment without the need to pursue a specific outcome. (From “Dialogue and Organizational Transformation,” Glenna Gerard and Linda Teurfs, *Community Building: Renewing Spirit and Learning in Business*, New Leaders Press, 1995.)

### ***Shareout & Gallery Walk***

Following the café dialogue sessions at individual tables, the café hosts facilitate a full-group share-out of the key insights or “ah-hah’s” gained during the café. They record these on flipcharts or other media and facilitate the group in identifying the café’s repeating themes, connections, and patterns around the overarching café theme—in this case, enhancing member value through a “Blueprint for Community.”

In addition to writing ideas directly on the tabletops, participants may also record their thoughts on individual Post-it notes, which they then post on the walls. During the gallery walk, all participants stroll through the room taking in the full gallery of thoughts on the walls as well as on the tables. The point is for participants to look at, reflect on, and talk about the knowledge, questions, and issues that are emerging out of the café before they talk about it during the full group share.

### ***The Enhancement of Graphic Recording***

The ASQ Member Value Leadership Summit also employed a technique called graphic recording, which is the art of creating a visual record of dialogue. Graphic recording, a non-linear form of capturing information, reveals connections between thoughts, ideas, and emotions. It synthesizes key messages into a simple, memorable form. The work was performed by graphic recorder Anthony Weeks.

## Setting the Stage

To start the summit, ASQ President Jerry Mairani was joined onstage by Executive Director and Chief Strategic Officer Paul Borawski and by Karen Vernal, a Milwaukee-based leadership consultant and ASQ member who has experience working with ASQ members, Board and staff. They oriented participants to what was about to take place in the summit, introduced the summit facilitators and design team (see sidebar), and offered information to provide participants a base of shared understanding.

### The Design Team

Danny Duhan	ASQ Chair
Jerry Mairani	ASQ President
Ron Atkinson	ASQ President-Elect
Carol Sager	ASQ Vice President
Connie Faylor	ASQ Treasurer
Clay Hodges	Chair, Section Affairs Council
Gary Johnson	Chair, Division Affairs Council
Sue Jacobs	ASQ National Director
Paul Borawski	Executive Director & Chief Strategic Officer
Laurel Nelson-Rowe	Managing Director
Pat Corkran	Manager, Community Care
Karla Riesinger	Executive Assistant
Beth Christensen	Assistant
Karen Vernal	Leadership Consultant
Arian Ward	Strategy and Café Dialogue Consultant

Jerry talked about the responsibility of leadership and “what we owe the world in terms of quality” by producing the next generations of quality leaders to carry on in the traditions established by the likes of Deming, Juran, Feigenbaum, and Crosby. He also introduced a theme that would be repeated by many participants during the cafes and sharing sessions as they recounted the stories of their own personal quality journey—that of the accidental quality professional. Jerry, like so many others, never planned on a career in quality. “I was drafted into it,” he said. “Then I got bitten.”

Jerry introduced the extreme home makeover metaphor as it applies to the summit. “The deserving family that gets the makeover is ASQ. We’re going to be asking how well our existing house fits the family. Then we’ll bring in the design team—that’s you—and we’ll ask you how we can build an ideal house for ASQ. We’re constructing a blueprint; this is a start. We’re going to learn how to be a leadership community through this experience.”

Part of that learning process over the following two days would require the summit participants to become comfortable replacing the telling and debating modes of communication with the dialogue and communion modes, which are more effective in leading to change in the status quo. “Connecting our heads and our hearts will be your key to engaging in conversations that matter,” as Karen told the participants.

As part of the data sharing process, Paul gave a presentation describing ASQ’s Living Strategy approach to setting direction and the futuring exercises that form a context for the Living Strategy. The information sharing continued Monday morning with a presentation by ASQ Managing Director Laurel Nelson-Rowe on member research data gleaned from ASQ’s customer measurement system and other research.

## From Ideas to Actions—A Sometimes Stormy Process

Participants rotated through three concurrent café sessions, to address three different questions, on Monday morning:

**Café 1**, moderated by Connie Faylor, ASQ Treasurer  
*What do we know about member participation?*

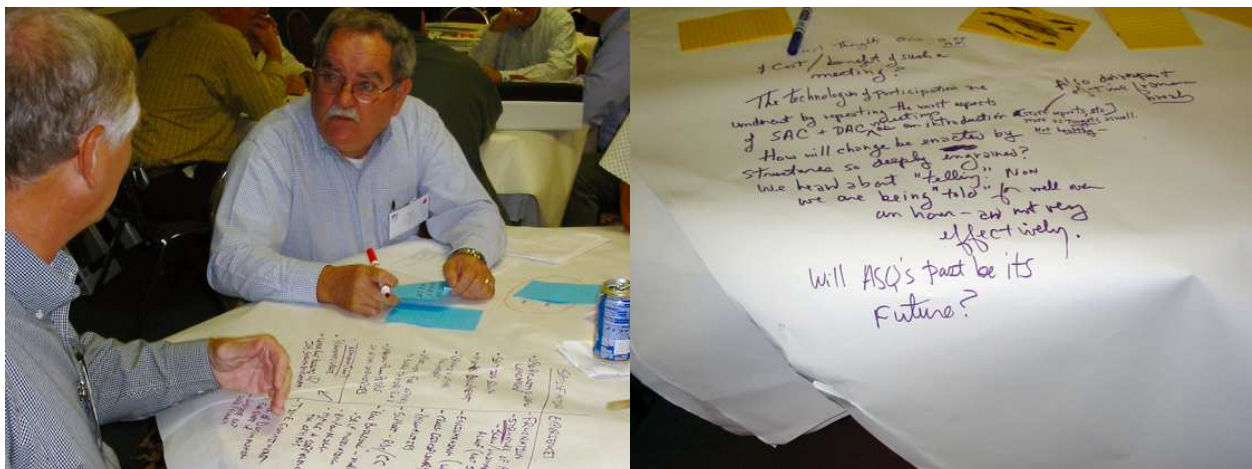
**Café 2**, moderated by Carol Sager, ASQ Vice President  
*What do we know about what members expect of member units?*

**Café 3**, moderated by Sue Jacobs, ASQ National Director  
*What do we know about member leaders' satisfaction and experiences in their role in creating member value?*

This exercise posed the first major test for the flexibility of the summit's design.

There was some confusion, with a number of people commenting on lack of clarity on meaning of the questions. Furthermore, frustrations began bubbling to the surface. There seemed to be two main sources. First, participants reported frustration with uncertainty about where the process was headed, a concern related to the comments about lack of clarity in the questions posed in the three morning café sessions. Second, many attendees brought with them comments they wanted to share as member leaders, and it was not clear where there would be an opportunity to air these comments.

These frustrations became evident at the start of the summit and were expressed in earlier dialogues and hallway discussions, but they reached a head here. Their common concerns include things like declining Section and Division membership; difficulties attracting and retaining people in leadership positions—the same few individuals are carrying the leadership load, holding multiple positions, and rotating with each other in and out of leader roles; and the small percentage of members who are active in member unit activities.







The concerns about the summit process prompted an on-course correction. As a result, additional attention was devoted to dealing with tension that clearly exists among the ASQ leadership.

Clay Hodges, Chair of ASQ’s Section Affairs Council, acknowledged the divergent opinions that came out. “We had the discussion we needed to have from these leaders. Now we can integrate these ideas into our working plans for the future. It’s our job as leaders to ensure that tension is creative, and I think we accomplished that.”

The adjustments to direction and emphasis allowed a profusion of thoughtful comments and insight to emerge through the cafes, which are summarized on the summit SharePoint site (<http://asqgroups.asq.org/summit/>).

Another course correction occurred during the Monday afternoon sessions. The Monday afternoon café was originally designed to select the best ideas generated in the morning breakout sessions and to turn them into “proposals” for new approaches to enhancing member value by adding more detail to them and then validating the proposals against the “voice of the customer” and the “voice of the implementers.” But instead of focusing further dialogue on the ideas generated in the morning breakout sessions (which many

people said showed little out-of-the-box thinking), the question for discussion was restated as: What, then, are the key ideas around member value that we need to advance going forward?

The café then proceeded as planned and generated specific proposals for creating member value that they would like to see developed (see sidebar for selected examples). Several participants grouped these proposal ideas through an affinity analysis, while the other participants engaged in a group dialogue around what from the summit, so far, has given them the most hope for the future. The Monday session ended by asking everyone to vote for their top three member value enhancement proposals (after they had been affinityized).



### **Building Committed Community**

How is it that the tensions that surfaced were not only handled constructively, but also served as a foundation for community building? Chalk it up to the happy confluence of two factors over and above the attendees' shared passion for quality and strong attachments with ASQ: 1.) deft leadership; and 2.) the

café format itself, which allows and encourages differing points of view to be expressed and to shape the direction of the dialogue.

Ray Culver, representing the Kitchener Section, thanked Jerry and Paul for demonstrating leadership through their facilitation of the summit. "You turned conflict into a positive," he said.

The sense of community began to gel around the list of specific proposals and even more so around commitments to move forward on an agenda of actions designed to address key member value ideas.



“Something incredible happened yesterday—forming agreement on community,” stated Paul Borawski.

Paul reviewed the Society’s Living Strategy cycle and business planning process so that participants could see the timing and development sequences that inputs to these processes will follow. In November, the ASQ Board of Directors will be the first to consider the “going forward” steps from the summit. Refinements to efforts already underway are possible, as is the early introduction of new ideas into the planning processes. Paul also encouraged leaders to consider what they might do immediately within their member units to enhance member value.

Gary Johnson, Division Affairs Council Chair, pledged that his group intends to follow through immediately. “Within DAC, we’re starting right away at our meeting next month to apply ideas and information generated here,” he said.

Gary’s counterpart on the Section Affairs Council, Clay Hodges, echoed that thought. “The message has been received loud and clear,” he said. He also pledged that SAC and DAC will give top priority to existing and future efforts to interact and integrate their activities, such as the Division liaisons for the Sections.

Jerry Mairani mentioned that Treasurer Connie Faylor will begin working immediately on ways to integrate knowledge from the summit into the design for leadership development work for the ASQ Board of Directors, beginning in November.

There was also interest expressed by Divisions and Sections in becoming actively involved in implementing the Living Strategy. “If that happens as a result of this summit, it will be a phenomenal event in the life of the Society; it’s something that has been needed for a long time,” commented Paul Borawski.

Steve Pevette, Chair of the Columbia Basin Section, suggested setting up a discussion board to continue the member value dialogue and expand it to a wider audience. He agreed to moderate the board, and Larry Smith volunteered to champion the project for the ASQ Board.

There was overwhelming consensus that this same group needs to meet in person again. “This event is going to be the cornerstone of the Annual Business Meeting next May in Milwaukee,” stated Jerry Mairani. He laid out how that would happen and also how the Board would integrate learnings and suggestions into its schedule. “Seven months from now we’ll be back together assessing how well we’re doing at implementing the ideas generated here,” he said. He pledged also to integrate this knowledge into the various member leader training events.

## Expressions of Commitment

During the final session of the summit, member leaders stepped forward to sign a pledge of commitment to work together as the ASQ leader community. They also shared some of the main learnings they're taking away from the summit.

"A lot of trust building took place," said Region 12 Director Kam Gupta.

Even some of the skeptics noticed the change that had taken place. Scott Rutherford, for one, said he's "still a bit skeptical, but hopeful" as he waits to see how actions are followed through on and implemented in the months ahead.

Bill McCullough of the Northern Nevada Section revealed that the summit has caused him to reconsider his previous inclination not to renew his membership. "I see a process here I really like," he said. He added, "I'm really drummed up on the idea of 'Quality U' training activities," referring to one of the many value-enhancing ideas generated (see sidebar).

Marsha Becker, representing the Cape Canaveral Section, commented on the hidden community that exists but is not evident. "We ARE together, but we just didn't realize just how well we are together as community until now," she said.

Shamsul Alam, Southern Connecticut Section Chair, compared the challenge of moving the Society forward with the challenge faced by every other organization that has tried to implement quality progress. "Quality can't move forward without commitment from the top," he said. I alone don't have the right tools, but ASQ can help."

"Communication strategy will be the key to building the community we desire; there's a hunger for this," said Diane Byrd of the Tennessee: Knoxville Section.

Govind Ramu of the Ottawa Valley Section pointed out that young people who are interested in quality are the hope for the future. "Let's do a similar session for our ASQ student branches," he stated.

Ricardo Amaral, representing the Birmingham Section, was impressed by the level of introspection he experienced at the summit. "Few organizations have the courage to stop and look at themselves in the mirror," he said. "This is refreshing."

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## Member Value Development Proposals

*Excerpts from the Gallery Postings*

### Training-Related Ideas

- Create certification training packages
- Provide the entire suite of quality courses covering the Body of Knowledge, in standardized packages taught in multiple modes by ASQ-certified instructors, to the mass market through all ASQ Sections
- “Quality U” knowledge dispersal
  - online, streaming video
  - moderators or mentors
  - cheap or free
  - adds upward mobility to members
- Training goals:
  - low cost
  - alignment and standardization
  - eliminate competition between ASQ units
  - cooperation---SAC,DAC Headquarters
- Have Divisions (or expert Sections) develop training to be used by the Sections for continuing education and certification prep; have ASQ HQ subsidize this training
- Cert/Recert-supporting technical courses, with web-based options; developed by Headquarters; deployed by Sections and free to Sections
- Open source educational Web site for a low membership fee
  - ASQ is an educational institution
  - Break down silos between National, Sections, Division (consistency of purpose)
- Enhance the education members value by:
  - increasing e-learning topics
  - Division-generated, peer-reviewed, knowledge-based training applied to industry available to all ASQ members (case studies)
- Pilot training program re Body of Knowledge for CQMgr, CQE, CQA
  - National provides vetted training material
  - National provides train-the-trainer training
  - Revenue sharing between Sections and National
- Address knowledge dispersal obstacles
  - quality control of the mentor and moderator
  - refresher or training level of material
  - managing the monitoring, mentor and completion
  - medium development---Web based, DVD, paper
  - licensing arrangements with companies
  - long-term access to materials

### Other Ideas

- Get quality courses into colleges and have ASQ membership as part of the course
- Develop standard advertisements that Sections can use
- Provide quality information to members on demand at no cost
- Enhance member value by providing information in a one-stop shopping setting
  - call it “The Quality Superstore” with a user-friendly Web site with up-to-the-second information
- Set up a first-year member greeting process
- Networking profile proposal
  - individual provides brief background
  - then work with a Buddy to engage conversation and introduce to other members
- Sharepoint site for program chairs
  - increase member value by improving quality of programs
  - Division contacts for program content
  - Find speakers by region with click on map
  - Keyword search
  - Best practices on site: How to get speakers; sign up to list yourself as speaker; discussion board
- Buy the Indiana Quality Council and supply electronically to Sections at cost
- Give knowledge away search engine
- ASQ HQ to use a full system of best practices to reduce variance; develop metrics, processes, audit & management review structure, continuous improvement cycles
- Make ASQ Web site simpler and more user friendly