

Pearls of Wisdom

We all have an extensive tree-related library. But what book, movie, or magazine article, not about trees, most influenced you and informed your consulting career? Tell us the title, author, and offer brief synopsis including what pearls of wisdom you gained from it.

I have found National Geographic magazine to offer a broad spectrum of perspectives on things that relate directly and indirectly to trees. The same is true for PBS TV programs such as NOVA and NATURE.

—Lawrence T. Hoffmeier

It was an article in ISA Arbor News back in 1996 about consulting and appraisals, and also in the same magazine was the contact for ASCA! I was awakened that I really needed to learn more about aspects of consulting and proper methods of doing so.

—David D. Hunter, RCA #408

All of the books that influenced me are about trees. Forest Trees of Australia—Johnson, The World was my Garden—David Fairchild.

—Barrie D. Coate, RCA#237

Over twenty years ago I realized that we, as tree appraisers, had little idea what value is, although we were professing to estimate it. Among the sources I consulted was a hard to find little textbook on real estate appraisal

given to me by a graduate school professor of mine. Unlike many larger real estate appraisal texts published by appraisal organizations, it was succinct and to the point rather than filled with organizational boilerplate. I learned from that book that value is the present worth of future benefits. That understanding has continued to guide my appraisal practice and my writings on appraisal.

Smith, Halbert C. and Jerry D. Belloit. 1987. Real Estate Appraisal. Century VII Publishing Co., Dayton, OH, USA. 341 pp.

—Scott Cullen, RCA #348

From the Bible: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, John—Solomon, John. The pearls I have gained from these excellent references are too many to list here but one essential highlight—There are over 70 different types of people, and their activities and/or responses to specific situations tells you what type of person they are thus, their future actions predictable.

The lifelong effort to understand and utilize these truths has profoundly affected my business decisions and my consulting practice—it has given me great advantage in negotiating and resolving conflict.

How to Win Friends and Influence People—Dale Carnegie. A very good book with lots of good advice about the importance of listening to people.

Sun Tzu—The Art of War—Gerald A. Michaelson. Excellent book on what it takes to win at anything.

Lead Like Jesus—Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges. Practical guide to leadership from a Christian perspective.

Thoughts of Chairman Buffet—Warren Buffet. Quips and tips that are thoughtful, witty and convey important truths in an entertaining way.

—Marty Shaw, RCA #470

We have all learned much from listening to others. Who gave you the best advice when you began your consulting or tree care business? What was the advice?

I met John Haller, an ASCA member, at my first conference in 1993, in Aspen Colorado. We started talking while watching a squirrel busying itself with nuts in the late fall weather. Conversation sped on to seed cones, consulting, tropical botanical gardens, and other subjects. He was eighty-something when I met him, and sent me a few letters, some with clippings from the numerous articles he had written over the years.

I was pretty fired up about consulting, but he cautioned me to grow into it slowly. He typed all his letters to me, but signed each by hand, with the script, also in handwriting, “Never stop climbing.” By the way, he practiced what he

preached, and still did a few fruit trees a year when I met him.

Long after his passing, I entered in a regional ITCC event, and surprisingly came in second overall. The guy who came in first, Dan Kraus, is an old friend. He called me a few months later and told me he had to get surgery on his knee—so I was going to the world championships. I had pretty much given up on ever doing that, but I got to go, and I met my twin goals—not being disqualified or coming in dead last.

The important thing about John Haller's suggestion is that he said it in the spirit of learning, not the spirit of competition. I re-read his "Aerodynamic Features of the Tree" article, from the 1990 JOA 16(9): September 1990, often. Science and language has changed so much since it was written, yet there is significant wisdom in it, so I recommend it to my colleagues and certain interested clients.

—John E. O'Shea

Advice from Thomas H. Everett, horticulturist at The New York Botanical Garden from 1932 to 1974 and emeritus until his death in 1986. We were friends for the last four years of his life when I was a new student of plant science. Speaking to me when I was 24 and he was 79:

"...you have a strong back and a strong mind. When you are my age you should be worth more to the industry for your strong mind than you are now for your strong back."

"...education is not about school, it's about life. If you think it's about two years of school get out of the business now. The people who have stopped learning are dead; they just haven't fallen down yet."

From Mike Ruggiero, horticulturist, mentor and friend at The New York Botanical Garden. Speaking to me as a student of horticulture:

"...there is nothing wrong about making a mistake, at least you're doing something, but try to make a new mistake every time."

"...if it is worth learning, its worth teaching to others."

—A. Wayne Cahilly

ASCA past president Sam Knapp. Don't worry about what the competition charges or the going rate. Charge what you think you are worth. If you value yourself low so will everybody else. If you value yourself high you will earn respect from your clients.

Sam also taught me that we can still maintain a professional relationship even on opposite sides of a tort case. He said it should not be personal; it is plaintiff verses defendant. That is comforting to know and hope others feel the same. It seems like human nature that some may get upset if their client loses because one consultant provided more convincing facts to the trier of fact—especially if the consultant feels really confident in their opinion. It leads me to believe that people skills and communication skills are very important, both verbally and in reports.

—Mark Porter

The late Bob Mullane (member of ASCA, ISA and Past President of TCIA) and I were on a plane coming home from the 1982 NAA conference in New Orleans. He said, "Scott, you and your partner are in a very dangerous place. Your business is no longer small, but it's not big. You can't get stuck there in the middle. You have to go back to being small, each running a crew, or you have to get much bigger." We were starting to feel that intuitively and we looked hard at the options. Within two years we had sold our company to Bob's brother Gary. I pursued arboricultural consulting as well as other business ventures.

—Scott Cullen, RCA #348

A piece of advice that applies to so many things, from a college professor—whose name now escapes me because it was so many years ago—told our class, all seniors, "If you don't understand what I said, ask me. That's the only way I know if I'm doing my job right."

—Lawrence T. Hoffmeier

The person who gave me the best advice was actually a salesman who was working for FA Bartlett out of Simsbury, CT in 1986. He discussed tree care and clean up and how clean up was the most important aspect of the job. We were working high end southern CT, and he said "the work clean up had to be spotless, because the people who hire you are looking at the ground when they come home, it's only after they have had a few cocktails do the relax and look up in the trees." I have found this to be true with tree work and consulting, keep the customer happy and keep it clean, the rest will follow.

—David D. Hunter, RCA #408

Dick Dunmire, then of Sunset Magazine. He provided the example of knowing every plant anyone asked about, plus knowing what the natives used the wood for.

—Barrie D. Coate, RCA #237

John Lee— "When you ask a lender for money, you must look like you are worth at least as much as you are asking for."

Joe Green— "It always comes down to the money—because without the money, nothing happens."

"With great wealth comes great temptation. God will prevent you from having either beyond your abilities."

"Successful leaders produce good problem solvers."

Ed Tyler—

“Money won’t buy you happiness, but if you must be miserable, you might as well be miserable in comfort.”

“It is best not too be to zealous, for who knows what truth may be revealed lest you find yourself zealous for the wrong cause.”

Earl Nightingale— *“Money won’t buy happiness—but it has brought people a lot more happiness than has poverty.”*

Leonard Isaacs— *“Forgive everyone, and if you have offended someone, humble yourself and seek forgiveness.”*

Albert Einstein— *“Problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them.”*

—Marty Shaw, RCA #470

Now that you are firmly entrenched in the tree consulting industry, do you

have any favorite group or organization that you routinely turn to for professional assistance? This may include but not be limited to a peer group such as ASCA or an educational or governmental organization.

I think ASCA has the best pool of talent nationally, by far. This listserve is a tremendous value to the members, worth the annual membership by itself. I learned a long time ago to surround yourself with smart people.

I also believe it is extremely important to develop relationships with plant pathologists, entomologists, pest control advisors, agronomists, arborists, architects, educators, city council members, urban foresters, researchers, clergy leaders, botanists, ecologists, attorneys, judges—and it’s really important to get along with your neighbors.

Get involved in regional green industry groups and invite these people to speak

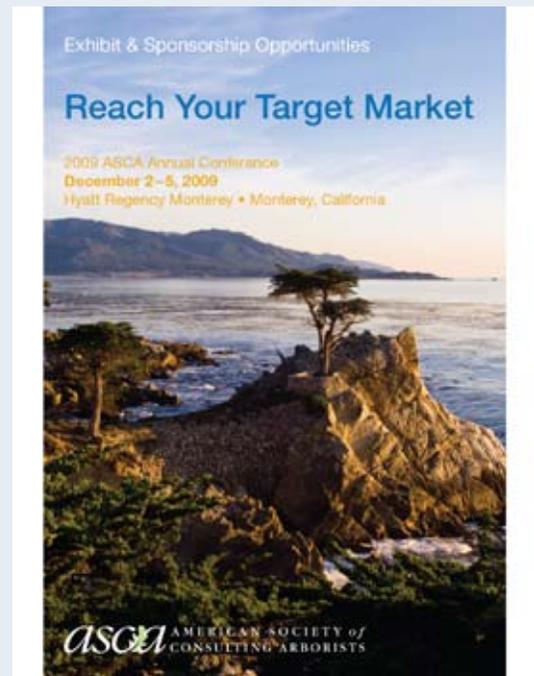
on relevant topics. I have a core group of friends that are extremely talented and treat me like an equal. I never feel like I am asking a dumb question when around my core group of professional friends. Many love to teach and are more than willing to share. It does not hurt to partner with some of them on certain assignments from time to time. Share and learn at the same time. A good way to learn tree appraisal: sell the job first and get a mentor to help. I did this some years ago. We all still learn and discuss theory and methodology together, a never-ending work in progress.

—Mark Porter

I certainly look to ASCA and ISA. I’m also a member of the Connecticut Tree Protective Association, which, along with the CT Agricultural Experiment Station, keeps me abreast of local issues. I’m a Supporting Member of the New York Botanical Garden where the world-class plant collection and library are invaluable.

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able resources. But, without a doubt, the most valuable resource is the personal network of colleagues I've met through ASCA and other organizations.

—Scott Cullen, RCA #348

When dealing with living organisms, the only thing that is entrenched is change. I look to extension service professors that will look me straight in the eye and have no problem saying, "I don't know." A verse of mine: "I hear but listen little to those intent on telling me how much they know. But for one that says 'I think this is the way it goes,' I pick up my pen, pad, and follow."

—Lawrence T. Hoffmeier

ASCA is the majority stakeholder of who I contact, then ISA, and then SAF.

—David D. Hunter, RCA #408

The Western Chapter ISA and Western Horticultural Society, meeting monthly in Los Altos.

—Barrie D. Coate, RCA#237

ASCA, CEO Fellowship, ISA (for CEUs), and local networking clubs.

—Marty Shaw, RCA #470

With regard to expanding your knowledge of our industry: is there any specific trade-related periodical, column, or other work, that you most look forward to receiving? Please offer detail if pertinent.

There is so much at our disposal, it is almost overwhelming—both online and all the popular books. We have to keep building our library, consulting templates, studies, research reports, etc. Studies posted on the listserv are great keepers to file in our document folders. It is really impossible to read all of it. Seminars and conferences are big business these days. Add all the notes and electronic copies that just

build and build—it is really hard to pin it down. As far as which books we use that make us the most money, I would have to say A Photographic Guide to the Evaluation of Hazardous Trees in Urban Areas and the Guide for Plant Appraisal 9th Edition. I don't leave home without them. I have a university publication that is very useful for species-specific reported problems.

—Mark Porter

I receive The Arboricultural Consultant, Arboriculture & Urban Forestry, Arborist News and TCI Magazine. I can't remember the last time I read any of them cover to cover. That's both because I'm busy and because I tend to read things that relate to some current "need to know." They all provide useful information of various sorts.

—Scott Cullen, RCA #348

This has got to be a trick question. Short of postgraduate studies, I know of no other group besides ASCA and ISA that focus on the individual as we do (I'm in both). If there is, I would like to know about them.

—Lawrence T. Hoffmeier

The Western Arborist magazine.

—Barrie D. Coate, RCA#237

I try to read them all. You never know where a good idea may come from. The ASCA Consultant is my favorite.

—Marty Shaw, RCA #470

We all recognize that tree care folks are a special breed. Particularly those who ascend to great heights with the intent of operating razor sharp gasoline powered cutting tools while suspended by a ½" synthetic line manufactured by the low bidder. Do you have any special talents or serious sports or activity interests that you feel may have attracted you to the tree care profession?

I played all the major sports as a kid and young adult. My dad grew up on a farm in Michigan and was a policeman. He got us into sports and taught us to dive for abalone (which made us money part time), how to spear fish and respect the ocean, just like respecting big trees, and knowing your limits. We pruned trees sometimes for some extra money. Dad raced sports cars locally. My grandfather was a professional boxing manager and INDY car racer, my mom's cousin was Featherweight Champion of the World in 1975 (Bobby Chacon). We rarely had a family get together where we did not have a boxing match in the backyard. So we were not raised going to the theatre and tasting fine wine.

I fished local pro am bass tournaments for five years, funded partly by sponsors and tree work. I spent way more money than I won.

One short tour as a medic in the Navy allowed me to work in a microbiology lab, xray, emergency room and clinic where I learned very valuable diagnostic procedures that I use today in my consulting practice.

A neighborhood friend gave me a job in 1976 climbing palm trees (on day two of the job) and I have since learned that money does grow on trees. We played a lot of sports in our spare time, skin diving, hunting, fishing, baseball, handball, boxed a little, poker, chased girls until the cows came home, drank cold beer and worked hard long days.

My experience in private work, utility and municipal tree care has taught me over the years that continuous learning is an investment—not just a reason to keep certified. Selling opinions based on your investment in education and experience is much easier than hanging from a rope. Tort remedy work has a component of competitiveness, even if we are to act independently and provide just the facts. It drives one to learn more, practice hard and work as a team.

—Mark Porter

I started as a hose dragger (the old heavy rubber stuff) on a spray crew as a summer job waiting to go to graduate school. As it turned out I didn't do that until mid-career. I stayed with that tree care company because I liked the work. I progressed to climbing for the whole extra \$0.25 an hour! I also had had a medical condition as a teenager that precluded me from many activities including climbing to heights, and I wanted to be a climber to prove I could do it.

I think it is very important to point out that, other than problem solving, tree-climbing skills are not necessarily consulting skills. A recent article in Tree Care Industry Magazine noted that many "older" arborists want to move away from arduous physical tree work or mentally stressful selling and managing. They may think it is a natural progression to start consulting. The requisite skills are very different and consulting can also be a high-pressure profession.

—Scott Cullen, RCA #348

As a kid I was given the task of finding and marking the rotten trees, now referred to as defective, that were not worthy of cutting, now referred to as harvesting. (You KNOW this was a long time ago.) While squirrel hunting I learned that if the dogs kept harassing the squirrel, ole' bushy tail would go to a hollow tree or at least one with a knot hole in it. If I followed bushy to his hideout instead of "harvesting," all I had to do was sit down, stay still, and wait for the dogs to chase 'em to the rotten tree. I applied this technique to my task and it worked pretty well. But the crew gave me a hard time when I missed one until the Crew Boss said I got more right than they did. That made me feel really good, but they still sent me to get coffee.

—Lawrence T. Hoffmeier

Used to climb trees and mountains as a child thru my twenties. It was a child-

hood friend who told me I could actually make money climbing and working in trees. Have been playing in the woods since I was very small and cut my first firewood with a handsaw and axe at age 8. Been in the forest and trees since.

—David D. Hunter, RCA #408

Training bonsai since 1952.

—Barrie D. Coate, RCA#237

Being cooped up on submarine for four years gave me a deep appreciation for being outdoors. That, and a good memory for details, gave me the native equipment to pursue a career in plant health care. Trees were simply the natural progression of a deep interest in plants that began with selling chemical treatments for a lawn care company. From simple plants to more complex, I moved on to shrub care, landscaping and eventually trees. I have never lost the desire to learn more about plants or to improve upon my chosen craft.

Bonus: Quotes By Marty Shaw

"Integrity is doing the right thing no matter what it costs you."

"What is an expert? An expert is someone who has traveled more than 50 miles and carries a briefcase. What is a consultant? A consultant is someone that knows who all the experts are."

"God is very patient. He will wait as long as it takes."

"Money isn't everything, but it sure is nice to have when you need it."

"If you are ever tempted to think you know all the answers, go sit in a heap of composted manure and look all around you. It is appropriate to stay there until you become aware and know that there is still much to learn. In this way you will avoid a much more uncomfortable existence."

"Before making any decision of significance, be sure to take the time to gather all of the related information and facts, then get advice from as many people as possible. You may still make a poor decision, but it could not have been made better by any other method."

"The secret to success is making more good decisions than bad ones."

"The secret to happiness is not found at the destination or the highway to it, but true happiness can be found in the side-roads, trails and the people you help along the way."

—Marty Shaw, RCA #470 🌿

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