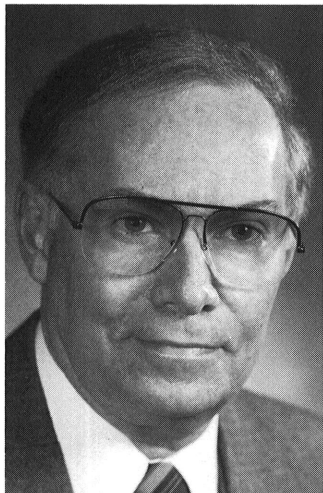


# Why Professional Management?

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Professional staffs for scientific societies have existed for decades. The larger societies have an obvious need—arising initially from the sheer volume of routine clerical work. Even small- to medium-sized organizations, however, have discovered in the past 20 years that volunteer time from members is not sufficient to perform the clerical and management functions necessary to keep services flowing and the society viable. If publications are involved, the time required from volunteers becomes excessive. In today's

world of work accountability, even academic institutions are reluctant to give faculty members carte blanche to serve the learned society.

As a result of the shortage of volunteer time available for the scientific society, a new breed of "professional manager" has developed who specializes in managing the nonprofit individual membership organization. Most organizations have recognized that special skills are needed not just to provide logistical support but also to implement intermediate and long-range plans to keep the organization growing and responsive to ever-increasing member needs. New journals, new monographs, larger annual meetings—all require thought, attention, and expertise that volunteer members cannot provide full time.

The larger the society becomes, the more complex and broader in scope its logistical needs become, requiring both clerical and professional staff with skills ranging from editorial to accounting to computer programming. Effective management of these skills is the responsibility of the professional manager. In earlier days of professional management, a retired scientist frequently went to work for his or her society, giving the members a feeling of confidence that their special requirements as scientists would be addressed by one of their own. Unfortunately, a good scientist is not automatically a good society manager. This approach may create more problems than it solves, since too close an association with the members' professional speciality may destroy the objectivity needed to make critical decisions affecting the "society" vs. the "science."

Professional management results in the accumulation of valuable experience that staff can use for the benefit of the society. One example is in the operation of the annual meeting. After serving as a local arrangements chairperson, most volunteers agree that "once is enough." It is in this area of meetings that professional staff can be most helpful to an organization. Booking hotels, arranging for food functions, and serving the needs of an exhibition require specialized knowledge and experience gained from observing the good and the bad from previous meetings. Of vital concern to any organization is

its financial liability to a hotel upon signing a legal contract. Today, many hotels include some type of cancellation clause in their contracts requiring the society to pay for sleeping rooms not used if the meeting has to be canceled or if not enough members stay in the headquarters hotel. Knowledge of these contract provisions and how to negotiate to lessen their impact is part of the professional manager's training and skills.

Publications are the backbone of all scientific societies. Almost all organizations have one journal and many have more than one publication, each with a different purpose and perhaps periodicity. The society must manage these publications effectively and efficiently if the members are to be served to the fullest. Cost-effective management of a society's publishing program requires a well-trained, experienced staff with both editorial and marketing knowledge. Editorial skills may be available from the membership, but marketing knowledge will rarely be found. But unless the society's publications can be sold—and sold for a profit—the organization will soon go out of the publishing business. It is in this area of "profit" that a professional manager can assist society officers in determining which items or services should generate a surplus and which should break even or have a slight loss. And unless a society has an unlimited endowment, it must generate some surpluses to continue to serve its members. It is a reality today that membership dues alone will not support the services and activities of the average medium- to large-sized scientific society. If a society offers some services at a financial loss, other services must make an offsetting surplus. A professional manager, with experience and training in marketing services to the scientific community, greatly assists the officers in making these decisions. The reluctance of the professional manager to lose money is probably a good safety net for any volunteer governing body.

Continuity of programming is an essential function of the professional staff. As presidents rotate off the governing body, programs established by them could be unintentionally downgraded or even dropped in the effort to get the new programs of the new president established. It is staff's responsibility to monitor the results of the various programs established by previous administrations, report the results to the governing body, and continue with or discard programs as instructed by the current administration. Professional management has the responsibility to keep all programs operating efficiently and to sound an alarm when and if a program appears to be in trouble or no longer serving a useful function.

The American Phytopathological Society has had professional management for more than 15 years. Recent editorials in *PLANT DISEASE* by Wiley N. Garrett (June 1982) and J. Artie Browning (August 1982) partially reviewed the Society's changing role over the past decade, especially in reference to its expanded publications program. The success of this program demonstrates the advantages of combining active volunteerism with a competent professional staff. And as the Society expands its scope of services and publications in the future, the need for professional management will grow.