

## ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Video Interview of: Richard A Charles

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Interviewed by: Charles Henck

Charles Henck

Good afternoon. My name is Charlie Henck and I'm a member of this historical committee and today we are here to conduct a leadership recall of presidential member Richard A Charles who was the president of ASHRAE from 1992 to 1993. Good afternoon Dick.

Richard Charles

Hi there Charlie.

C.H.

I think I'd like to start off the interview by having you give us a little background about yourself.

R.C.

Okay, well I'm one of the fellows that grew up in this business. My father was a self-made man who came from England as a young boy, while a young man I should say, 18. And he was one of those people who came on a ship to Ellis Island and he, as steerage. And so I have had a lot of fun going to Ellis Island in seeing, visualizing what these people went through. My father came here and worked as a mechanic, a steam fitter plumber. And when the work became hard he decided he ought to go into another area so he became a draftsman. He went to night school and then he became a mechanical engineer. So for my early recollections of my childhood I was involved in this business one way or the other. In fact somebody asked me the other day what was the first recollection of doing something in the engineering field and then I can remember that as a teenager when I wanted some spending money my father would show me a set of plans and a slide rule and tell me that if I made these calculations that that would be about the same amount, he would pay me about the same amount of money that I needed for my little venture. So I can remember doing that as a young person and at the time I thought this is somewhat interesting but really not, not something that I wanted to do because I wanted to be a photographer. Well as time went on I graduated from high school and the Korean War started so I said well, what's my possibility of getting, getting by, well it wasn't too good. So I ended up serving four years in the Air Force in photo recon. When I came out I was married and now what am I going to do. During the time that I was in though and after I got out I was able to go back to college, not necessarily full-time but on a part-time. I would take courses and, so I never did finish my college education I'm one of those people that came from a school hard knocks. And believe me along the way especially working in the engineering profession it has been difficult. And so anybody that has ever asked me what you recommend, I say you get your education. I have four sons, they are all college graduates none of them in this field. The've all

had an opportunity to work in the business but they never took my challenge. In my challenge was that if you're going to be the boss's son you got to be the best. You got to be better than the rest. Otherwise everyone would say that the only reason you're here is because you're the boss's son. So they don't work for me and that's fine. My real benefit from- well by the way I have four sons and it of course a good wife of 41 years, and I have five grandchildren and most of them live close by except for my youngest son who is a Marine pilot. That he's off doing is flying right now.

C.H.

That's good. How did you get involved in ASHRAE?

R.C.

As a young designer working in my dad's office and by the way my father was one of the first mechanical engineers licensed in the state of California in 1948. They have the professional licensing act and he was one of the, I think he was number 50. I was working for my dad and a sales rep came in one day and asked me if I'd like to go to an ASHRAE meeting. Well of course you know if you're working at this business ASHRAE handbooks are our Bible. So I knew ASHRAE but I've never gone to the meeting before so he took me and when I was there I was impressed with the fact that I met all these people who were involved in the same industry. I heard the names before and now I saw their faces because we had self introductions and a nice chance to meet people and then we had a technical session. And I thought well this is great look at all this information they're giving out and that really impressed me, was the sharing people gave at these meetings. I don't care if it was the speaker or whether it was the individual and over the years I found that to be true. If I had a question or problem I could call one of my peers, one of my ASHRAE friends and they would share with me what they had done or what they recommend and that again impressed me with this great Society.

C.H.

So there was an early introduction into ASHRAE when you first started working.

R.C.

Right.

C.H.

From that point, I guess you got involved in some chapter activities?

R.C.

I did. You know it's like anything else if you get, our chapter was the Golden Gate chapter in San Francisco. And our policy there was if you come about maybe five or six times you're on a committee. We will put you on the committee before we even get you signed up maybe. Now that's not the, maybe the official way to do it, that's the way we do it. And so I know I served on a lot of committees before I even became a full member, which I know is not probably the right thing to do but that's what we did. And I got interested because of the technical information that I received from ASHRAE. We decided to put on seminars and they were six weeks long and we picked a series of subjects and we had one night a week for six weeks and I ran that for three years. And again I found that it was so easy to get people to speak and we always had a great turnout so that was my introduction to committee work. Then I was on attendance and membership, research promotion, I don't know what we called it back then. Then eventually I went through the chairs and I was the chapter president in 1975-76.

C.H.

Well that's good. Now did you ever do any regional work? Or regional offices?

R.C.

Yes, I began as an energy management vice Chairman for our region and after three years I became the regional chairman and director for region 10.

C.H.

And then from there, well of course being a regional director you're on the board.

R.C.

I had I think had one year hiatus and then I was elected to vice president which I served for two years and then Treas. and then President-Elect and then President in 92-93.

C.H.

That's very good. During your term as president of ASHRAE, what was happening in the world at that time?

R.C.

As I look back, in the world I don't remember the world events as much as I remember what was happening that affected us in ASHRAE. And I think the three things that I found that were very, the big concerns of every place I went, was CFCs, energy conservation, and IAQ. And depending where you were, it would vary as to their importance maybe, but those three concerns were always mentioned as being the primary concerns.

C.H.

What was the Society doing at that time to address these three issues?

R.C.

Well, the Society was very much involved with the CFC issue. We had written position papers and we had done a lot of research on a lot of different refrigerants and of course we endorsed the Montréal protocol. And we encouraged people, we had seminars and we had different meetings in order to encourage people to plan on what they were going to do, how you were going to relate to this phase out and so we were very involved in it.

C.H.

And then as far as the energy management what was going on then?

R.C.

Well energy, we had the opportunity to meet with the DOE, Department of Energy. They were very concerned because they had already created the National Energy Act of 92 and one of the mandates was that all states have an energy conservation policy that would either meet or exceed standard 92-90.1, 89. And so ASHRAE was going to be the flagship. You had to meet our standards and yet it was a standard and not a code and knowing that the states were going to have to create codes we met with DOE and we proposed that standard 90.1 be created into a code and they agreed. Thought it was wonderful that we would even consider creating a code because they had always been asking for codes and we said no we are a standard organization. So they agreed to fund the efforts. That was done in Battelle Labs and we created a what I call an oversight committee to watch this process to make sure that the code work with not deviate from the standard and our oversight committee did a great job and we ended up with a document that is actually a code. Not only that we made a decision that other standards that are involved in issues that couldn't be code related, that we would make them into codes as well. Let's see, 62 is an 89 and I guess it would be 55 something, any of these standards that could be codes would be made into codes which I thought was a great effort.

C.H.

I think 90.1 is being rewritten right now and will be written only in code language, not in standard language anymore.

R.C.

Right. Right. So I think that and IAQ of course we all know that ASHRAE has been working hard at the IEQ situation in having our IAQ meetings each year and incorporating as many of the medical people we can into our ASHRAE committees on the, what is our committee that we have environmental health I think it's called. And so were doing our part of there, along with the standard work we're trying to promote the understanding among people and of course we conclude a lot of programs in our meetings and I think that we are doing it very good job.

C.H.

What was the theme during your presidential year?

R.C.

Well if you haven't guessed, it was sharing resources globally. You know that I felt all my life that the sharing was a very important issue and I have had the opportunity to travel all around the world before I became involved with ASHRAE as an officer by merely attending the different meetings and conferences that we had in various places and so as I went overseas I was really impressed with the number of people that were ASHRAE members. I was even more impressed that they designed things and they did their work just the way that we did our work and I really understood very fast how important our handbooks were, our standards, and everything else. We had this commonality in our design processes.

C.H.

That's good. Was there one person that had a great influence on you in ASHRAE. You mentioned the initial manufacturer's representative that invited you initially into ASHRAE but was there somebody else to had a big influence on your ASHRAE career?

R.C.

I tried, when I read your questions prior to coming here I thought you know you're always looking back and trying to find somebody specific the end there were people that probably had more of an influence on me maybe because I was more receptive to them but I think that there were so many people from the people that would merely just ask you if you would want to serve on the committee. I think that's really wonderful. The reason that we don't have more people serve is because they're not asked.

C.H.

That's true.

R.C.

People just assume that they're going to come up and say hey I want to be on this committee. It doesn't work that way. People don't feel like they have the ability, or time, or whatever reason and so if you ask them though many times they'll say yes. So I start back with those people who invited me to participate and then I think as a one of the line and people would say would you like to do this, you know be the energy vice chairman. One of the persons that really impressed me was, I had a man in our chapter who's been involved for a long time, Tom White. He's another sales representative in fact he was the, more or less the office manager for a company, dealt with products. And he comes to all our meetings, I think he's probably 85 - 86 years old, still come through the chapter meetings very interested in young people trying to promote them off. He's always been there, kind of encouraged me to go the next step.

You ought to do this, you ought to do that you know. In the meantime you know you say, why I can't do that or I don't have that ability. No, no, no, come on let's go, let's do it. And then I'll never forget the meeting in 1986 in San Francisco and I was at the Hilton Hotel and President Bahnfleth at that time came to me and we were standing out on the rail looking over the city and he said did you ever think about becoming president of the society? And of course you know I, - no. The truth is that I had always had several goals in my life, one of them would be ASHRAE president, fellow in the organization, PE, all the things but you know when somebody asks you point-blank and more or less you say who me.? My wife said when we were laying in bed wide-awake that night, she says what's the matter and I said well, and I told her the story, and she said oh no you would even think about that would you? But she knew that started it, and start my thinking process and that was back in 1985 and you know I think that people like that, I don't know what he saw in me but the point was he had enough faith in me to even consider asking me that question. I consider him to be a mentor and it's been that way right along. People that you run into who will come up to you and they'll see something in you that maybe you don't see and they encourage you to go the next step.

C.H.

That's good. What would you say you would, like to say to a new engineer starting out, you mentioned early about you know inviting them and getting them involved. But what else would you say to a new engineer getting started in this field today?

R.C.

will I tell them all when they come into my office, I have been president of my engineering firm for 37 years and that happened because my father passed away all the sudden and I had a choice of taking the small engineering company and either trying to hang onto it or going to some other business. And by that time I decided this was a pretty good business and after I was left holding the bag so to speak and all of the responsibility I found out real fast what this business was all about. So when I remember those experiences and I see these new eager people come in to our office and they've been through school now and they're ready to go. And I tell them all the same story, I say this is one of the best professions that a person can work in today knowing what the opportunities are, knowing what the needs are, and if you are ready to pitch in and really, you got to be willing to do more than just the basic norm because anybody can just come and do a job. I have two Chinese designers working for me and they've been there for over 30 years. They've reached a plateau of what they wanted to do and never go beyond it. Now they're very good at doing what they do but they stopped growing. And if it wasn't now that they are ready getting close to retirement they would be out because they have ignored the new technologies I mean we're pretty much CAD oriented today and they don't touch computers. So I wanted to continue to use them I'd have to have them do the layout and then somebody do it on CAD and with today's market it's very difficult. So I tell people that ASHRAE gives you more, well let's put it the other way. ASHRAE will give you whatever you put into it and 10 times more. If you just want to be a bystander and come and go to the meetings and absorb, you know, be the sponge and let someone else do the work, you get just that much out of it. But if you get involved and you give back you're going to get so much more from it. And I help them along because I helped sponsor, I pay the dues and I pay the chapter meeting expenses but only if you participate. If you don't participate, you just want to be an ASHRAE member you pay it yourself, you're on your own.

C.H.

That's a good philosophy.

R.C.

I know. We traveled to different regions as I was president and I held what I called a thank you breakfast or the employers. We did a breakfast or lunch and we'd invite from anywhere to 12 to 20 different people who had been sponsoring ASHRAE members and just to thank them. But while we were there and we were thanking them we were also asking them why. Why do you do it? And we got some very interesting responses, the common response was that we feel technical advancement is very important to our business so in any way we can encourage people to continue to become technically advanced and whatever their field is we want to support it. So we will pay one membership to one society for each employee. One place I went they told me that this man was the most, this employer had the most participation from any employee in their chapter. I mean his employees participated more than any other company. So I thought well I went to hear what he has to say. So I said what you do for your people? He says I don't pay their dues, I don't pay their chapter expenses, I don't do anything. Come on, how come he has such participation? I go every meeting, I'm on committees, I try to be a leader. I agree that's also a good way to do it.

C.H.

So he's setting the example for his employees.

R.C.

He's setting the example. And what more can you say, the boss is doing it and I'm not going to be there. Hmm! And that's a message. By the way, when I came back to my chapter he asked if I would be the attendance committee chairman. I found out, we had our president who is a professor in the University and so she was very interested in knowing who was attending, so she has all the statistical data, who the names of the people were. She gave me this diskette with all these names on it so we did a little program at the end of the year and found out that 57% of the people that attended our chapter meetings that year were not members. Not members? Furthermore we went down to find out where they worked. Got a nice list of companies where these people worked. So now what we're doing is we're setting up a little program, I'm writing them a personal letter as an employer wondering why, no I'm not a putting it that way, I'm going to ask them what do you do to encourage people to work in this Society. In a few pointed questions like that and then I'm going to challenge them at the end and see what happens.

C.H.

Sounds like a good concept.

R.C.

I don't know, I mean I just think that it's the same philosophy that people, you don't have it because he didn't ask for it, right? So we will see what happens.

C.H.

So you're going to ask them all become members.

R.C.

Yes. And these people I mean, I gave all that information to the membership chairman so we'll see what happens.

C.H.

That's good. Now since 1993 what have you been doing with the society? I'm sure as soon as your term was over as president, all of a sudden you didn't just fade into the wood work, I'm sure you're on other committees and things.

R.C.

Well, the society has a plan for the has-beens. First of all they put you on the nominating committee as a vice chairman and then as just a member on the long range planning committee. So there are two committees you go on automatically. That was my first experience on nominating committee and this year's my second year out so I was the chairman of the nominating committee and I was so impressed on how the Society picks its leaders. In fact I don't know how I ever made it. I mean the process is so thorough and so detailed that I am very impressed with it and I think that's probably the reason why the society has maintained its status this hundred years. And long-range planning - my first - got on that committee I thought, oh gee this is going to be dull, you know I mean the future, we got so much to do right now - I mean this thinking of the future business and trying to figure out what we're going to be doing five years from now, 10 years from now. The first thing I was exposed to was the survey done by, what was it, ?

C.H.

Outside ?

R.C.

Yeah, I remember only hired this company, they did this membership. The results we got from that were unbelievable so my first exposure was listening to this to our presentation on all this data that they had collected. I was overwhelmed. Things I was overwhelmed with was that as a Society we have to one of the highest satisfaction level of any members, of all the members. More ASHRAE members are happy with ASHRAE than any other technical society.

C.H.

That's phenomenal.

R.C.

Yeah. And the things that were wrong, some of the things that were wrong were things that we knew were wrong but just didn't know and still don't know how to fix them that we were aware of. So I thought it was an enforcement on one end but I was surprised at the satisfaction rate.

C.H.

I think going back to both your survey as well as your nominating committee, Society is really a grassroots organization.

R.C.

Absolutely.

C.H.

Where the chapters feed up to the regions, the regions have nominating committees to nominate people for various offices in society. And that all feeds back up to the top.

R.C.

That's right. The one thing that many of our ASHRAE people don't realize is that ASHRAE is the individual. It's not Atlanta. It's not the officers. I mean they are part of it but it's the grassroots. And I just came back from, Don Rich and I started a program when I was president, the overseas chapter were in a limbo. They are going to be assigned to region 10 but it was a, like an off year type of thing where

they had missed the cycle, they weren't going to be able to go to that meeting and so they were going to miss coming to a CRC. So I took Don Rich, who was the president immediately before me and we made a trip to each one of the chapters overseas and put on a one day workshop on chapters. And we sent them a list of all the material that we can cover and ask them to specifically check off the things that they would be interested in. The response we had from that trip was a real eye opener because it was sharing again. We presented and we listened to what they were telling us. This last, two weeks ago we just came back from Hong Kong, Bangkok, and Singapore. And the purpose of going was that the Far East or I should say the chapters in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur put on themselves a Far East conference on the built, let's see, designing for, what was the word for it, designing in the hot humid climate for the built environment. Three-day conference, two days a technical engineering like we do in our ASHRAE. Third day with health, health oriented. Nothing but doctors in research people talking about IAQ. I was so impressed with the quality of the conference, the papers that were presented, 70 papers presented in three days but more impressed was the talking to these people after the conference was over in getting their viewpoints on where they feel they are. Now Singapore has been an overseas chapter now for 13 years and they are concerned about how they can be more involved in the Society. They've gone to regional meetings now, they found out what it's like to come forth with motions and have those motions acted on and see those motions go forward and see them become, many of them become part of our society. They're so impressed with this democratic process and they're so excited and now the question is what are we going to do, how are we going to get these people more involved. But that's the part where I see that we have great potential. We are recognized as the world's leader. We surveyed overseas people and asked them how they felt about the American society of heating, ventilating, refrigerating engineers and whether we should change the name to something else other than American. Their unanimous response was we joined because we wanted to be part of the American society not the international society or something else. Which surprised me a little bit but we have gained that prominence of being the leader, that the name is not really an issue with them, and that impressed me. And that's what we've been doing. Two years ago our president was asked to come to South Africa to visit one of our, what we call Associates societies, SAIREC. And they were going to have a conference. He was unable to make it so they asked me if I would come and naturally I said yes. And when I was there the conference again was, it was great. Great papers, well done, they had a mini tradeshow. Super job. Then they asked me if I would be willing to travel through South Africa to visit other cities and meet with our ASHRAE members. At their expense! I mean they paid for all of this. I mean that, I said to myself, first of all, and they told me point blank, they said we felt such an honor that you would come all this distance to meet with us that we would just like to share you with other people. And so I was able to go to Cape Town and meet with about 50 of our ASHRAE members there. And up to Johannesburg and meet with another 50 or so there and it was just the enthusiasm that you see in these people. They've been ASHRAE members many of them for years. They've never been to a Society meeting, they've never even met another ASHRAE person outside of their country. If you think about this and say that's pretty good. One of my meetings, meeting with a group called REHVA, which is the umbrella organization for the refrigeration air-conditioning heating in Europe. I think they have about 18 member groups, which they are the umbrella for. And we were meeting and one of the men stood up and took me by surprise because he said I have been an ASHRAE member for many years, I'm also a member of this group, and that group, and other groups. He says



ASHRAE is the only society that I belong to that gives me something for my money. I get monthly magazines, I get a magazine and a newsletter, I get a yearly publication, a handbook, I have access to all kinds of technical data, standards, publications, at a reasonable price. And he was just - he couldn't say enough. And I'm sitting here thinking to myself and yet he's never been to a chapter meeting, a regional meeting, the society meeting, a technical conference and he thinks he's getting all the benefits. And here we are sitting here in our country, we have so much that we offer and that people, our own members do not take advantage of.

C.H.

It's a shame more of our own members don't take advantage of that.

R.C.

That's right. All I say is that it's their loss but how can you get that message across.

C.H.

That's true, that's true. Any other items you'd like to discuss today?

R.C.

Well, one thing I, when I was thinking of the different things that happened in my year I had been told when I was a vice president and being considered for, I guess I was treasurer already so I knew I had a chance that I could become the Society president, and I'd always been told about the power of the office of president. That he basically he could do anything and that many times he did do anything. I mean he would just take what was going along here in one direction and change the direction completely. That bothered me because I figured that if we had a society that had goals and that we were, we had objectives we were trying to reach you're not going to do this if you keep deviating from them all the time. So I came up with this idea and I sent a letter, a question survey type to past presidents. Thought out that there were 25 immediate past presidents that were still involved in ASHRAE. And so I sent them a letter and I asked them to answer these questions for me and I gave room on the form just to do it so there went have to be any extra effort on their part. I said what was your greatest accomplishment, what one item did you want to do but did not see accomplished during your term, what should ASHRAE be doing specifically any one item that you think we should be doing right now that were not doing, and then what general area do you think we should maybe be working in that were not working in now that were not involved in right now. And lastly I asked them what committee that they could, they felt they could function in and be of value to the society or what their interest was. I got back ultimately - I got back 25 responses, no I got back 24 because one passed away. And I was really impressed when I made a tally of all their answers of how closely and how they just float along. There wasn't this big deviations. There were some minor, there'd be some tilts maybe a little or emphasis one direction or another but there was just this flowing all the way through. When you look at their themes year-by-year they were complementary, they just kept building on it and that impressed me. And some of the, I made a tally of what they felt we should, the single items we should be working in and the overall areas we should be working in and I developed some pretty good ideas of a consensus of where the Society could be. I was so surprised that that's exactly where we were going. And that really helped me, it helped me to understand the overall picture, some idea of what these people experience and what they felt we should be doing because I really valued their input and during my presidency I sought their advice two or three times about issues that were coming up. One of them was that we created this new publication during my year. I had the opportunity of appointing Raymond

Cohen as the editor, and the panel and off they went. And I was so impressed when I finally saw the first publications this year. The International Journal of Heating, Ventilating, Air-conditioning, and Refrigeration Research. And that's something that I've always felt very strongly about because we've had so many people object to some of the articles that we would have in the ASHRAE Journal, they'd say they are far too technical, you know they're research quality. We need to have more articles in the Journal they'll be of the how to do it and more of the practitioner type articles than the research oriented. So I was very, very thrilled to see that happen. And I'm even more thrilled to know that we have 800 people subscribing to it and that the two issues that have come out have just been great. The idea of this research Journal is that the material in it will be archival material. It's the kind of papers that you can go back and look at and say, hey, what did they say here and it'll be timeless, which I think is great. What else? That's basically, I said this to people and I can say it again that during my year of presidency it was everything I imagined and more. The places that we were able to go and the people we met, I didn't do like Fred Kohloss did who, he visited I think 63 chapters during his year. I think I made a total of 20 and I tried to set some criteria like if you had a special event coming up or if you had not had a president ever or if you had not had one in five years that you would get priority. And the request I got were 75th anniversaries and 50th anniversaries and then I would go to a few others that were in the area where I was going to be and I could make them. But every place I went I found the same thing, people who were devoted to this industry and they were deriving some livelihood from it. Right? They were either salespeople, they were research people, they were contractors, they were designers, engineers, maintenance people, you name it but somehow they had a connection to this industry and they were involved in the society called ASHRAE because they saw the benefit of putting something back into it and getting so much more out of it and that impressed me.

C.H.

Well thank you very much. On behalf of the Historical Committee I'd like to thank you for spending this afternoon with us.

R.C.

Great. I've enjoyed it very much. And hope that some time in the next years we'll be able to see more, I don't plan on being around for the next 50th celebration. They keep talking about ASHRAE's 150th years but posterity will have that opportunity. Thank you.

C.H.

Thank you.