

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)  
Transcription

Interview of: Bill Harrison

Date of Interview: January, 2010

Interviewed by: Don Rich

Note: Some of the audio, particularly for Don Rich, is not loud enough to hear what is being said. Noted as (inaudible).

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 Bill Harrison with me here today. Bill is a life member of ASHRAE and served as Society president in 2008-2009. Good afternoon Bill. Thank you for agreeing to being interviewed as part of ASHRAE's leadership recalls program.

Bill Harrison

Good afternoon Don. It's a pleasure to be here with you today.

D.R. (Inaudible)

Bill Harrison

I grew up in Arkansas and went to the University of Arkansas and selected industrial engineering as the discipline that I wanted to follow. When I was interviewing I always assumed that I wanted to go into a management track in the industry but about halfway through the interview process I talked to a fellow who was selling General Electric turbines and I was really impressed with the enthusiasm that he had for his job and with a wide variety of assignments that he had in his normal occupation. And so I changed my emphasis in interviewing to engineering sales and interviewed a number of companies. I really liked the opportunity in the HVAC&R field. At that time of course HVAC&R was really growing as a lot of the existing buildings in the United States were being comfort conditioned, being air-conditioned, cooled for the first time. So I selected the Trane Company, went through their graduate training program and was assigned to the Freeport, Louisiana sales office where over the years I worked up from a route salesman to being a sales manager for the office and then had an opportunity to go back to Little Rock, Arkansas and open a business to represent Trane commercial systems in Arkansas. I have an opportunity to participate in a lot of different facets of the air-conditioning business. We're in the controls business, we're in service business, we do some installation work, and contracting and we do a lot of, we provide a lot of application engineering advice to the design community all focused on commercial and industrial HVAC&R. I think that engineering sales are very challenging career and it's one that probably doesn't, is not visible enough for the people who are graduating and interviewing for jobs out of engineering school.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

It's really, I've been fortunate in that I've had a very interesting career and I've worked in areas where agriculture was very important and done some very challenging work as far as working with design professionals and contractors to create really dry environments and some very humid environments and very cold environments so from a technical standpoint, food has always been a technical challenge. Recently there's been a lot of emphasis on energy efficiency in HVAC systems. The first presentation that I ever made showing an owner how to reduce the energies use of an HVAC system was in 1967. I remember well, making a proposal to change the type of system in a large multi-use facility and I believe I projected we could save a third of the energy on the project and everything was going great until he found out that he was going to have to increase his investment in the project and get a payback on, through energy savings. And you know I find that even today that's still one of the major obstacles that we have to overcome when we're, when we're presenting energy projects, is the owner's reluctance to increase his investment.

D.R.

Well tell me how you got involved in ASHRAE?

B.H.

I was fortunate in that when I first went into a field office, the engineering sales manager that I was reporting to for training was very involved in ASHRAE. So I had been in the office a month and one afternoon he came in and said you're going through an ASHRAE meeting tonight. As I recall they provided me with a membership application at that very meeting and it was a very fortunate thing because shortly thereafter I transferred, came off training and transferred to Shreveport, Louisiana which was to be my home for the next 17 years. And the next year, one of the members of the Shreveport chapter board moved out of the city and the board asked me to take his role on the board and so after only having been in Shreveport for about six years I wound up serving as president of Shreveport chapter and it was really a marvelous experience for me. It gave me the opportunity to practice leadership skills and some public speaking skills that I wouldn't have received for the next ten years if it hadn't been for my opportunity through ASHRAE. I really credit my early ASHRAE experiences, one of the reasons that I've been able to stay in the business and achieve some degree of success.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

Absolutely. And as an employer we have probably a dozen members of ASHRAE in my business at Little Rock. I always encourage them not only to take part in the local ASHRAE meetings but also come to society meetings and drive to catch as many of the technical programs as they can. The opportunity to learn and advance your career through ASHRAE is unsurpassed and ASHRAE does a wonderful service to the industry by making those opportunities available.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

I have always been interested in increasing the efficiency of HVAC systems and I work pretty hard at that throughout my career. One of the things that I observed is that some very well designed and well constructed buildings suffered a real decay in performance because the people who are operating and maintaining those buildings didn't understand the energy conserving features that had been designed and built into the buildings. So as I approached my presidential year, I had a couple of things that I really wanted to do and the first one was to increase the industry's awareness of how important the proper

operation and maintenance of buildings really is. Many of our green buildings, they quickly fade to gray whenever the people operating the building don't know how to take full advantage of the energy conserving features built into the building. I've been very pleased with the reaction that I've gotten around the world really, to that message when normally when I deliver that message I see a lot of heads nodding out in the audience and even occasional burst of applause because this is a, this is a situation that has been noted but hasn't really been brought out in the open to the extent that I think it is today.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

When you start looking back over a career and trying to single out an accomplishment or a program that you've done, it's really, it's really difficult to do. I think that again a consistent theme in my work in the industry has been how can we take energy out of the systems that we use while we still maintain the comfort and protect the health and productivity of the people that are occupying the buildings. It's really hard when you're so focused on building science to remember that the building's only purpose for being there is to protect the health and safety and enhance the productivity of the people that work in the building. I think that over the years that ASHRAE and my profession have enabled me to bring that message to a lot of different groups. And I think it's a message that is very appropriate today just as it was when I started some forty odd years ago.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

Wish I had those questions before hand, I'd have been better prepared to answer. Hi how are you?

D.R. (Inaudible)

**Editorial Note:** interaction between video technician, D.R. and B.H.

B.H.

I'm trying to answer is if I wasn't answering a question. I may not be doing a very good job of it.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

That's a big mess isn't it.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

Oh well I don't have any idea where I was for when we quit.

We've gone off into the, what am I proud of.

Right. And I did not, I did not pick that up but I did talk about what I tried to do.

I don't know that that needs to be in there.

B.H.

I think that it's incumbent on those of us who are senior in our businesses to encourage people who are just coming up in the business to have the same sense of duty to give back to the industry that's motivated so many of us over the years. I think that it's easy in today's corporate world where cost cutting is the rule to forget that developing our young people is the most important strategic thing that we can do for the long term health of our business. I know of no way in our field, in the HVAC, in our field, that young people can accelerate the development of their leadership skills and develop the sense of duty to the industry. I don't think that there's any way better than participation in ASHRAE. We encourage our people to participate in ASHRAE on a local or regional and a society level. I have a son who, without pressure from me, became very active in the Student Affairs Committee of ASHRAE and I'm very proud of him. I hope he continues his interest and I hope that he continues to view ASHRAE as one of the important ways that he can get back to the industry.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

As you, I view what's going on in the world today, I think that the challenge that all technical societies must deal with, and especially ASHRAE, is the globalization of our industry. Tom Friedman wrote in his book, *The World Is Flat*, commenting on how communication, technological communication improvements have changed the world. They really have changed the world. They made it possible for a design center in China or India to communicate to a design center in North America seamlessly. People can work virtually anywhere in the world on the same team and contribute. So while for many decades most of the development work in HVAC&R was done in the United States and ASHRAE's international efforts were to distribute that information to the rest of the world. Today much of the design work and much of the development work in our field is being done at design centers outside the U.S., outside the United States. And I see our role in ASHRAE as to collect the best ideas of all of those ASHRAE members from around the world and to do the same thing we've done for decades which is to organize those developments and publish documents that let other people share in the technological process, technological progress being done all over the world.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

Certainly, we've seen a transition from national manufacturers and national companies and enterprises in the HVAC&R field into global companies. And today when you travel through Bangalore for instance, there are dozens if not hundreds of modern office buildings with development centers for almost all of the companies that would be recognized in the Fortune 100 and most of the Fortune 500. Those development centers work seamlessly with operations that are located in North America. China also has a large number of technical centers for these global companies. And these people are all working seamlessly. We have to engage those people in ASHRAE and we have to make sure that they have the opportunity not only to benefit from the services that ASHRAE provides but also to contribute so that we can benefit from their work.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

I think that that people who are beginning their career today probably have more opportunity than any of us had in the past because with the explosion of technology, they have the ability to contribute to the

extent that they're willing to think deeply and to work hard. My advice would be to use the technological advances and communication, the social networking, the Internet, the computers, the Twitter and Facebook but to never forget that in order to fully realize your potential you have to be able to interact very positively with people. So in addition to all of the faceless social networking, spend time with your peers. Use organizations like ASHRAE to exchange ideas so you test your leadership skills to develop communication skills speaking in public speaking and all of the other persuasive skills that are so important to someone's complete their professional development. This is the world today where the opportunity is virtually unlimited. But it's a world today where people can optimize their professional growth being part of organizations where interpersonal relationships are grown and honed and you can just enjoy your peers and the other people who are suffering the same growth pains that you are. I think that even though we can use technical social networking advances to communicate effectively, face to face and interpersonal relationships are more important than ever.

D.R. (Inaudible)

B.H.

Your are very welcome, it's been a pleasure.