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Catalysts for Change Converging on the Emerald City

BY CYNTHIA B. GRUSKOS
PBSN PRESIDENT

I AM THRILLED TO JOIN MY COLLEAGUES FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY in Seattle for what promises to be one of the best ACCT Leadership Congresses to date. This year's theme, "Catalysts: Cultivating Skills for the Future," deeply resonates with me. As professionals supporting college boards of trustees and presidents, we should embrace our potential as catalysts for positive change within our institutions and the broader community college landscape. The Professional Board Staff Network (PBSN) Executive Committee has worked diligently to create conference sessions designed to inspire attendees to realize their potential as catalysts for positive change. These sessions will equip you with the essential knowledge and skills for effective board governance.

We can be catalysts for change by developing connections with our peers, enabling collaboration and mentorship. I encourage you to take the first step in building stronger relationships by attending any of the PBSN sessions planned for the conference. Consider taking on a leadership role on the board or using ACCT Connect to communicate with fellow members. If you support your board of trustees in any capacity, you are automatically a member of PBSN. Attending these sessions guarantees that you will leave with new connections and essential skills.

In today's fast-paced professional environment, staying ahead demands the adoption of innovative technologies. Our plenary session at the PBSN Conference on Thursday, October 24, will focus on leveraging technology and generative AI to enhance board efficiency, streamline operations, and facilitate strategic decision-making. Having explored generative AI myself, I am convinced that to be catalysts for change, we must develop forward-looking skills to prepare for future technological advancements. Join us for this session and come ready to learn best practices and insights on innovative technology.



For the first time, ACCT has invited PBSN to hold a concurrent session. Our session, titled "Catalysts of Collaboration: The Strategic Roles of Trustees, College Presidents, and Board Professionals," will delve into the increasingly vital role of board professionals in today's rapidly evolving higher education landscape. This session will highlight how board professionals act as essential connectors between boards of trustees and college presidents, facilitating effective governance, strategic alignment, and seamless communication. A panel featuring the leadership teams of Lansing Community College and Cerritos College will share best practices that have shaped their leadership journeys. We encourage you to bring your college president and trustees to join this robust discussion, which will emphasize the critical contributions of board professionals.

On my list of strategies for being a Catalyst for Change is embracing continuous learning. Shelby Foster has written an insightful article entitled "Lifelong Learning" (see p. 43), and I hope you take the time to implement her suggestions in your daily lives.

One of my favorite professional development opportunities has been to serve on the PBSN Board. I have served as a member-at-large, and most recently as vice president and now president. There is great potential in PBSN, and I encourage you to consider getting involved by running for an executive committee position. We will hold our annual business meeting on the morning of Friday, October 25, during which

elections will take place, followed by regional roundtable discussions. All PBSN members who have attended or participated in a PBSN business meeting or workshop within the last two years may run for office and vote. The positions are outlined in the PBSN Charter located in ACCT Connect under the PBSN Group and in our Resource Center. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at cgruskos@brookdalecc.edu or by phone at 732-224-2204.

Serving as your president over the past year has been a true honor. I have had the privilege of working with an exceptional executive board, and I deeply value their contributions and friendship. I am especially grateful for the support of my college president, Dr. David M. Stout, who consistently encourages me to grow in my role and take on new challenges. I am proud to serve the best community college board of trustees, who are my heroes. They serve selflessly, giving their time, efforts, expertise, energy, and wisdom to advance the work of Brookdale Community College. A special thanks goes to my mom and dad, who instilled in me the values of higher education, hard work, curiosity, perseverance, and gratitude — all essential qualities for a Board Professional. At our annual meeting, I will pass the gavel to the capable hands of Shelby Foster, our incoming PBSN President. I look forward to supporting her in my new role as past president.

We look forward to seeing you soon, and to an inspiring and transformative conference in Seattle!



Seated, from left: Reatha Bell, Cynthia Gruskos, and Shelby Foster; standing, from left: Dr. Larisa Pfeiffer, Benita Duncan, Yvonne Sandoval, Caitlin Murphy, Lori Hazel. Not pictured: Dr. Michelle Scott and Dr. Sara Singleton.



Lifelong Learning

BY SHELBY FOSTER
PBSN VICE PRESIDENT



WHEN I STARTED WORKING AT OHLONE COLLEGE, I STARTED TAKING COLLEGE classes again — archaeology, photography, yoga... it had been a while, and everything looked interesting. Our college offers opportunities for employees to take classes tuition-free, and I realized just how much I missed going to school.

As my own mini-renaissance, these classes allowed me to learn new skills and embrace newfound interests. Taking classes where I worked also allowed me to see firsthand what it was like to be a student at my college, providing me with valuable insights into the student experience. Hopefully you've had the chance to take a course at your college, and hopefully it inspired and enlightened you.

But while all of our respective college courses are amazing, there are so many things we can learn outside of class. I challenge you to continue your lifelong learning in other ways. Here are a few suggestions:

Learning to Disconnect — Perhaps your average workday sails by in a blur. You leave for the day and realize you are stepping outside for the first time since the morning. Try taking five minutes a day out in nature or away from your screens and your phone. Allow yourself time to take a few deep breaths and re-energize yourself before returning to the office. Try making it a daily habit! You can learn a new way to approach the day. You might as well... the way you already know kept you inside.

Learning a New Skill — If you finally got really good at your job five years ago but started coasting on those skills, then you are only really good at what your college or district needed five years ago. Get in the habit of learning new things by making learning fun. Not all new skills will be fun, but developing that muscle can be. Recently, I had the opportunity to take tap dance classes. I was not good at all — my coordination left much to be desired! I had fun, though, and made new friends. I even participated in a recital at the end of the year. Taking tap dance didn't make me better at my job, but I learned that there is freedom in trying out something with no expectations... and that does make me better at my job. What's something you've always wanted to try?

Learning to Get Outside Your Comfort Zone — Sometimes we get to a point where our workday routines turn into a rut. We know our jobs inside and out, and there's nothing new on the horizon. Well, what if there was more we could do? Challenge ourselves? Perhaps give back to others?

Two years ago, an opportunity to run for Professional Board Staff Network Pacific Region Member-at-Large came up. I had been in my board support role for 15 years and was looking for an opportunity for professional development. I was nervous, but I decided to go for it. Doing so was one of the best decisions of my career. I have watched myself grow professionally and learn about my leadership style. I also made phenomenal friends across the country.

I encourage you to get involved with PBSN. It is an amazing group of your peers, and a chance to connect and be inspired. It is also a reminder that others are doing the same good work that you are and that they are willing to share their experiences and best practices. I hope that we will see you at the ACCT Congress this October. Let's continue on this journey of lifelong learning together!



Learn more at www.acct.org/membership/PBSN.