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Enjoy the Ride: Lessons from a Harley Rider

By E. Lander Medlin

We spend over a quarter of our lives at work. As such, the work ought to be interesting and fun with a sense of purpose—a place where we can make a difference. Even as we climb out of the worst recession since the Great Depression, it is critical to recognize that the work we do in facilities has great meaning, purpose, and value for our institutions. Yet in times such as these, we have a tendency to become anxious and worry about things we cannot control or influence. In fact, worry is counterproductive and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The statistics around worrying are startling. It has been estimated that 80 percent of the things we worry about never happen; 15 percent of the things we worry about happen but we cannot control their outcome anyway; and 5 percent of the things we worry about happen and we could actually do something about them, but we expend so much energy focused on the other 95 percent that it impairs our ability to deal with the remaining 5 percent effectively.

VALUABLE LESSONS

When I first decided to learn to ride a motorcycle, I fell into this pattern of worry. I was anxious and tentative, constantly worrying about everything that *might* happen rather than focusing on the

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things I could actually control at that very moment. My riding experiences have

given me insight into some valuable lessons that translate well to the shaky, unsettled work environment we face today.

In riding a motorcycle, is it

imperative to maintain your focus; keeping your eyes on the road at all times, constantly expecting the unexpected. It is equally important in the work environment to stay focused on what you can do, can accomplish, can influence,



Top: Lander Medlin and her Harley-Davidson 1200 Custom Sportster; bottom: Lander and friends in Myrtle Beach, SC



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and keeping your eyes open for new opportunities and new possibilities. We just cannot get distracted and expect to stay in one piece. This type of focus works two ways for the rider. Because your focus is on what you are doing at that very moment, it actually enhances the pleasure of the ride. In turn, this provides an opportunity for down time from issues and clears the mind to look at those issues at a later time with much greater clarity, a renewed focus, a different perspective, and a new outlook.

Although riders boast about "the journey versus the destination," it remains important to have a travel plan for your final destination, and at the same time being flexible enough to adjust to new realities as they materialize. We cannot control everything that comes our way, but we can be nimble and flexible, ready to respond when the situation changes. Recognize that no plan is perfect, but no plan whatsoever is a recipe for disaster. It has been said, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." The plan itself ensures the proper mental focus and direction. It identifies milestones or stops along the way to show progress, share experiences and successes, and ultimately makes the experience more meaningful and pleasurable.

STEPS TOWARD A GOAL

Mental focus and planning are indeed essential, and go hand-in-hand with building your riding skills and proficiency and develop-

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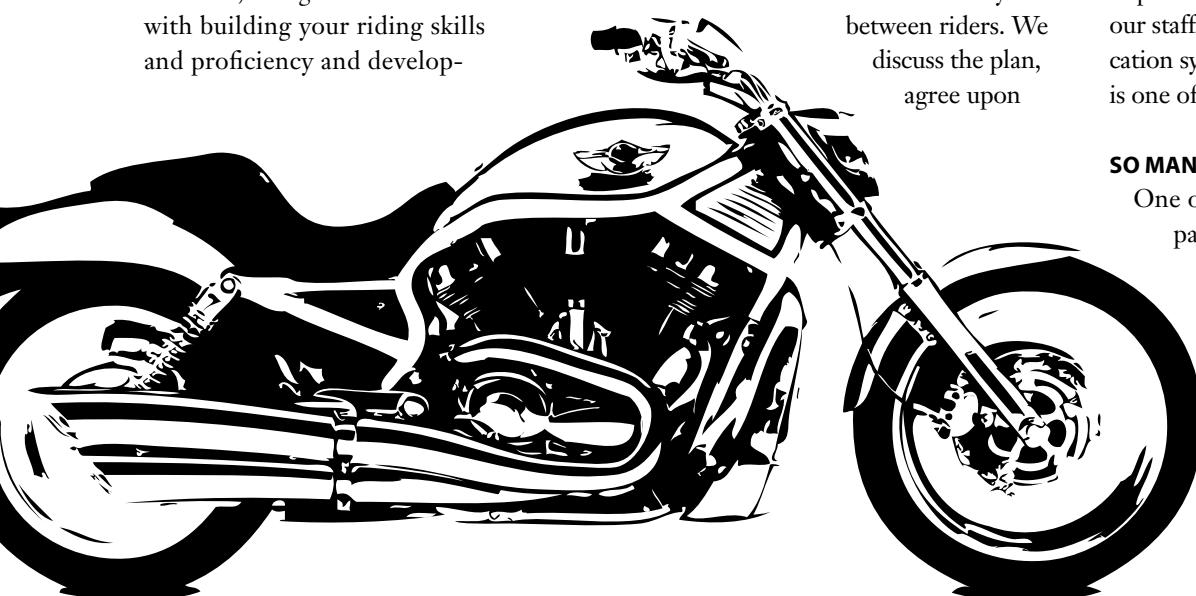
ing the right engrained habits. Initially it was imperative to take the rider's safety course to acquire the fundamentals. However, that was only the first step of many. Reading books, seeking advice from experienced riders, practicing the "slow" skills weekly, and taking more advanced training courses improves proficiency and increases one's confidence level. This is exactly the point of APPA's professional development continuum, where we slowly but surely grow and develop the skills and abilities of individuals and their organizations. This growth goes from engaging in supervisory, managerial, and leadership training, to obtaining a certification. And APPA is THE PLACE to gain individual proficiency standards and achieve organizational excellence.

One of the things we found in riding that enhanced our ability to control our environment and make the ride safer and more enjoyable, was a good communication system between riders. We discuss the plan, agree upon

milestones, and address the obstacles that come up along the way to keep everyone informed and to ensure our individual/group success on the road. Our organizations are no different. Without a good communication system, things become disorganized, confused, and chaotic, which leads to inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and less than desirable results. We need good communication systems so that everyone is clear about the organization's direction and that feedback occurs along the way. In fact, the changes in technology have increased the pace of communication and changed expectations for delivery and response times. Keeping abreast of technology, and the use of various social media along with upgrades in equipment and individual capability, is critical in today's business world. Websites and work control centers now go hand-in-hand. These channels of communication break down the old silos, help us keep up with the fast pace of today's technological society, and can greatly improve the efficiency and productivity of our staff/organizations. A good communication system helps to get things done and is one of the keys to great relationships.

SO MANY BENEFITS

One of the benefits I had not anticipated was the friendship, fellowship, and camaraderie I found within this riding community. It is incredibly similar to the collegiality I encountered when I first joined a local state chapter of APPA 25 years ago. This carried through to my region and then international APPA.



Clearly, people are open, welcoming, and available to help one another – you just have to ask. What a rich network of professionals to have as unlimited resources to enhance your professional capabilities. As a result, I have developed lifelong relationships and friendships, some of which I consider my closest friends. My life would be impoverished without the richness of these people and these experiences. It's simply all about relationships anyway!

Never lose sight of the joy of the experience. Riding releases all the senses so that you are part of the landscape you're driving in, as opposed to driving through it. The roar of the bike on the open road and the freedom is exhilarating. The companionship of the group and planning for the next adventure has exceeded my expectations and added immensely to my quality of life. I would not have expected these outcomes from such an activity.

This joy can indeed translate to the work you do. It's about lighting the fire and the passion from within, and allowing it to permeate all that you do. Certainly I have experienced the same joy from my facilities and association work—the relationships built over time, the sense of purpose and value of the work, and the community in general. Understanding the joy and value derived from these relationships, many retirees have come back and made enormous contributions after their official retirement from their institutions. If I have my way, no one will ever retire from APPA. These people have too much to offer given the depth of their wisdom and the value of their continued contribution to the profession and to our younger generation. We can all benefit from greater connections with these retirees.

Ultimately, what makes riding a Harley fun? It's all in your mind; it's mental! For I am sure there are far more comfortable ways to get to a destination. The French philosopher Camus said, "Your life is what your thoughts make of it." Worry affects the way

we think and then the way we behave. To break the cycle of worry, we have to change the pattern of our thoughts and then the ways we behave. Frankly, most of your life is in your head, as most of your daily conversations occur within yourself. So, focus on the good, forget the bad, spend your energy on what you can do, and make your choices accord-

ingly. Let's face it; it's not worth doing if you're not having fun! APPA isn't just about helping you get your work done; it can indeed become an integral part of the joy and richness of your life. ☺

Lander Medlin is APPA's executive vice president; she can be reached at lander@appa.org.

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