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Executive Director's Message

LANCE C. BUHL

I know that each Executive Director of POD has felt a surge of excitement at the prospects of managing the affairs of the Network for a year. And each would describe the complex bundle of that sensation in a distinctly personal way. For me, the excitement has to do with three clear themes.

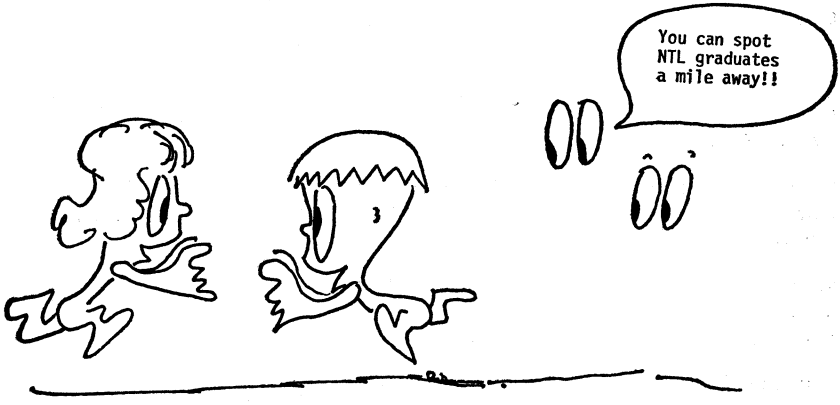
The first is namely *solidity*. POD, under the skilled and caring stewardship of the three past Executive Directors, Joan North, Mary Lynn Crow and Glenn Erickson, has matured. It is a solid organization with unique professionals, perspectives, and commitments. Its maturity has been achieved by a conscious negotiation of two possible alternative models of organization: serving simply as an informal support group and loose network or as a formal, even impersonal professional association. POD members have given up neither of those alternatives; we seem, rather, to learn something about how to build community by maintaining and working with the resulting tensions.

Two signs of this maturity deserve special mention. Members of the Core Committee have come to work effectively together as a policysetting body operating within the norms of consensus decision-making. They practice the values they espouse and in doing so have mixed an intriguing, workable blend of task and process. The Committee has turned its collective attention to the future beyond the immediate year, initiating the planning for the next three annual conferences: Fall, 1980 in Berkeley, California; 1981 in Ohio; and 1982 in either the Montreal or Toronto areas. The founding and successful operation of this *Quarterly* has been and will continue to be an immensely important vehicle for the dissemination of our ideas and the exchange of important professional information. I want especially to thank David Outcalt, first and outgoing editor of the *Quarterly*, for building so sound a foundation.

The second theme is *values*. It may only be a function of middle age for me, but values ring loud and clear in my ears and none so well as those which set POD and its members apart. It is sometimes difficult to remember that we, who so often work at the edges of the academic enterprise, do serve larger ends when we promote faculty, instructional, administrative, and organizational development. We may not have all the answers, but we do have a real, a unique set of value-informed perspectives, skills and information. It is greatly needed in higher education these days. We have evolved or are close to evolving a value-orientation that is soundly connected to and in keeping with the civil libertarian tradition.

Think of what we do. In the face of manifold pressures toward dehumanized educational decisionmaking created by the accelerating contraction of resources, we assert that individual potential—of each student, of each faculty member, of each administrator, of each staff person—needs institutional attention and support. We call for more systematic cultivation of learning and the learner, for human-centered and data-based evaluative systems, for collaborative and synergistic problem-solving and decisionmaking, and for the nurturance of the personal and professional urges to growth. We advance these claims, not only as matters of principle, but as central aspects of practice. We know that if higher education in a democracy does not facilitate the development of a competently free citizenry there are few other institutions that can.

Do I overstate our case? I believe a survey of our own literature provides pretty convincing evidence in support of these contentions. But I raise them not to stimulate our self-congratulation, but to set forth what I believe to be *our challenge*. That's the third theme. We need to assert our values, perspectives, skills, and special information more loudly and publicly. I'm hopeful that POD members will use the *Quarterly* as a vehicle for the exploration and more clear exposition of our values and ethics. In this connection, I am pleased that part of the newly adopted editorial policy makes room for values essays—systematic reflections on those notions which inform our practice.

POD is a unique association. We have matured organizationally without abandoning original vision. We lay claim to a proper set of values fully within the best of the democratic tradition. We have a

marvelous opportunity in what we do and in these pages to define the particulars of those values for our own and for others' edification. These are the themes that excite me. I hope they find responsive chords in you.