

'Issue Challenges' project will make ERA a stronger advisor

At the meeting of ERA's incoming and outgoing executive committees in late April, one of the group's discussions focused on the reasons these particular reps are ERA members. Not surprisingly, the most common response centered on the benefits of networking activities, educational programs and the sharing of best practices that occurs through our many publications, teleforums and events.

The discussion then evolved further, with the group identifying the ongoing and often overwhelming challenges that our members face and that ERA can address in ways that will strengthen current members' reasons for belonging and provide prospective members with more reasons to join. *(As noted in my column in the Spring 2015 issue of The Representor, the more members we have, the more powerful ERA's "voice" becomes — in and beyond our industry on behalf of the outsourced field sales function.)*

Out of these conversations came a new initiative built on the premise that **success lies in HOW you answer the challenges ... and ERA can help.** This "Issue Challenges" project is led by Paul Nielsen, CPMR, our immediate past president and now chairman of the board, Kathie Cahill, CPMR, our senior vice president/education, and Bob Terwall, our association president.

The Issue Challenges

The Issue Challenges are set forth in a list of questions to both reps and manufacturers that, ideally, all members and prospects should be continually asking themselves. "Ideally" is the critical word here because we all know there is very little time today for reflection and forward-thinking because everyone is so busy keeping up with day-to-day business demands.

So, as only an association can do, ERA is taking the lead to put the questions before you and offer some guidance in answering them. To give you an idea of the broad scope of the issue challenges, here are just SOME, but certainly not all, of those questions. *(Also see the ad on page 16.)*

- Who's your next principal or rep?
- Are your line interview and preparation processes up to date?
- What's your transition plan?

- What have you taught your personnel, principals or reps and/or distributors lately, and how will you educate them going forward?
- How have you recently become more efficient and productive?
- Do you have business mentors? If not, how will you fill that void?
- Whom don't you know, and how will you connect with those people?
- What don't you know, and how will you fill in those gaps?
- Amazon's coming! What will you do?
 - Do you use CRM? How can it be more effective?
 - How have you improved your industry?
 - What's your legacy?

So ... now what?

With the challenges these questions present, the next steps for your ERA leadership and staff are to develop and provide the resources to help all members and prospects to respond individually for themselves. That's a huge, complex task that will surely spread over the next year or more, but the first step has already been taken. The cover

story in this magazine offers ideas on answering the question regarding what you have taught your employees and business associates and how you will provide them with more learning experiences. Feel free to "borrow" and adapt any of these best practices for your own company.

Other Issue Challenges will be addressed in future teleforums, through surveys, via social media "discussions" and in several types of publications, including *The Representor*. Be on the lookout for the Issue Challenges name and logo on many upcoming activities and programs.

And keep in mind that, just as you and your company rely on your trusted business advisors — lawyers, accountants and others — you can and should be relying on ERA as your advisor for all matters related to the outsourced field sales function. There's another plus as well. You can use the Issue Challenges information and guidance to share with non-members when talking about the value of belonging to ERA. You do that often, right?

Remember ... on your own, you can be good ... but with ERA you can be better!



by **Thomas J. Shanahan**
ERA Executive Vice President
and Chief Executive Officer
e: tshanahan@era.org
p: 312-419-1432

The Issue Challenges are set forth in a list of questions to both reps and manufacturers that, ideally, all members and prospects should be continually asking themselves.

Watch for this logo every time an ERA program, survey, publication or social media post addresses one of the Issue Challenges.

