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This statement was made to Quint as Captain of the Orca, the shark-hunting boat in JAWS. It remains as one of the all-time great ad-libbed lines. If you have never seen it as it was out 44 years ago (Yikes! Am I dating myself?), go find it on the web and watch it.

Several folks reminded me of this line during our 50th Anniversary Conference in Austin back in February. The funny reference was to the fact that our conference was SOLD OUT once again this year with the audience in the room approaching 400! Many of the attendees came up to me with congratulations while noting the SRO atmosphere. However, they also "cautioned" me to not become a victim of our own success; not to lose that "secret sauce" that makes our conference so special and somewhat unique. Our conference offers attendees the opportunity to choose the breakout topics that THEY want to listen to as opposed to a one-size-fits-all agenda.

We certainly are looking to take this advice to heart while we walk the tightrope during the planning session for our 2020 ERA Conference, scheduled for Feb. 23-25. But exactly how do we pull this off? An interesting dilemma for us for sure!

All of us at ERA are most appreciative and quite humbled at the resounding turnout at our conference. As we often say, it is YOU, the ERA members, who make ERA the great organization that it is. Your investment in time and precious treasury do not go unnoticed. More importantly, your active participation in our conference "hands-on" format allows for many lively discussions at both the General Sessions and the Breakout Sessions. Trust me when I say that your passion and commitment is never taken for granted.

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Our conference is perhaps one of the most tangible services that ERA provides to its members. It provides a venue that is casual and informal, allowing for small and large reps, distributors and manufacturers to mingle and discuss common issues. As we often learn, regardless of the size of our company, our issues are the same. Even if we are competing reps or distributors in the same territory, or manufacturers with the same products/technology, we can often quickly get on a common ground, share best practices

on how we may have addressed this issue ourselves and learn from each other as fellow industry citizens. It allows our company presidents, VPs and sales personnel to actively interact with and learn from each other. In many cases, this one-of-a-kind event provides us the opportunity to meet industry folks that we would never meet due to geography or competitive challenges.

So, how can you help, you ask?

Our planning process for the 2020 Conference has already begun! We are positioning our different conference committees and sub-committees who will guide us in selecting the best content for our general sessions and breakout sessions and providing speaker recommendations. We are looking for volunteers to help us put on another great conference - with real and applicable content delivered by OUR ERA experts! The hours are long and the pay is lousy, but the reward is priceless!

So, do we really need or even want a "bigger boat"? It is really up to you as you guide our committee into the 2020 Planning Process - come help us figure out how to keep our boat the same size while delivering another great event!

Your captain.



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