

Professional Development Conference Wrap Up

by Kristine Baumgard & Irina Novikova

On a bright Saturday morning Professional Development Conference attendees said "Bring It!" as they entered Yazaki Learning Center at an early hour of 7:30am. Titled "Sharpening Your Skills – Getting Involved in Your Development," this year's conference was held in Canton, Michigan and gathered 77 bright and capable professionals from all over Detroit Metro and beyond. We also hosted 20 very engaging and knowledgeable speakers, with some visiting from as far as Utah to be part of this exciting event. Attendees began their day with a networking activity, added brand new this year, while enjoying an energizing breakfast of fruit, whole grains, coffee and juice. To emphasize and promote the value of human interaction we encouraged everyone in the course of the day to meet five people they did not already know, learn their name, what they do in their current profession and their future plans. The activity proved a great success, bringing the group together almost immediately and helping us welcome those who were new to the conference.

Exciting as it was, however, it was only the beginning to a great day! The conference commenced with a pitch from energizing, inspiring and otherwise, simply fabulous Keynote, Cheri Najor. Defying all convention, Cheri, not only had us dancing to some trendy tunes in the first ten minutes, but also began by saying she is not here to teach us anything new. Instead, she continued, she would talk about change in a slightly different way to help us grow to our full potential in these no-doubt difficult times. Cheri's presentation titled "Who Moved My Cheesecake?" was largely based on Spenser Johnson's book "Who Moved My Cheese?" and called for some introspection on our end, as we honestly confessed which of the four mice characters we thought we were. She then led us into an earnest discussion about why people may resist change, what we can do to reduce the stress a change can cause, and most importantly, how to make changes that lead to greater happiness and fulfillment.



Following the keynote address, conference breakout sessions revolved around two developmental tracks - personal enrichment and career growth. The sessions explored personal and career aptitude necessary to sharpen skills and to preserve work-life balance during these demanding times. Different from previous years, we featured a body of speakers reaching well beyond automotive industry, such as consultants, financial advisors, technical writers, university professors, motivational speakers and health professionals. With a multitude of choices among such informative and enlightening sessions, such as Multi-Faceted Careers, Inner Engineering, Dealing with Leadership Burnout, Stress Management, Nutrition On-The-Go and many more, all of us had a difficult time selecting only one to go to during each breakout session.

The conference culminated with raffle drawings and recognition of our corporate sponsors, as Yazaki North America Vice President of Human Resources & General Affairs, Lynn Weaver talked for a few minutes about the importance of community involvement. Lynn concluded her presentation saying: "There is a drive to get involved, to share what we have, to give, to make a difference."

We congratulate SWE-D planning team and everyone who took part in making this year's conference such an outstanding event. During planning stages, we made sure to carefully consider the difficult economic situation many professionals are in at this time and, despite rising costs, firmly decided against raising registration prices. "It shows how much valuable time went into making this event a success and I was delighted to come, learn, share and partake with so many talented and dedicated professionals from all over Michigan and the US!" commented Irina Novikova, General Motors service engineer and SWE-D VP of Student Services. Any other feedback we received was also overwhelmingly positive. Another attendee commented, for example: "Environment was friendly, not 'stuffy' and I got a chance to meet new people and reconnect with some former colleagues I had not seen in several years." And a first-time conference attendee thought: "It was exciting to meet so many women engineers from different companies seeking ways for personal and career development." In view of such encouraging comments, we extend sincere thanks to our corporate sponsors who so generously supported us in this endeavor. We are also appreciative of the set of exceptional speakers who shared their time, experiences, unique knowledge and skills with conference attendees.

Thanks again to our sponsors, who we couldn't have done this without!

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We are inspired, energized and look forward to reuniting again next year for a PDC10!