

THE ACADEMY OF ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING

Paper presented by

Lawrence E. Martin, Fellow

The NECA Chapter Manager
and Other Remarks as Presented to the
NECA Chapter Managers' Institute, February 24, 1981
April, 1981

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
 THE DIVISION OF THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES
 DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

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 UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
 1954

If your chapter adopted the standard bylaws recommended by NECA, you are the official secretary of the chapter. It is my belief the records you keep should be as concise as possible and include only the programs or procedures adopted, and the financial reports. It is the concensus of the managers with whom I have talked that the reading of long minutes, about unimportant matters, is boring to the members. An attorney told me about all that should be included in minutes were date and time the chairman called order, the place of the meeting, statement there was general discussion of the chapter's activities and the time of adjournment. Obviously, this would be too brief yet it does emphasize the need for omitting non-important items. I suggest you keep in mind there is always the possibility the FBI or some other Federal agency might want to review your minutes.

Prior to my employment as manager of the Northeast Texas Chapter, I had worked 17 years for the local Electrical Utility Company. The jobs I had with the company were primarily customer relations, customer service and public relations. During that time I had much to do with and also was in charge of extension of lines to serve new customers, new contracts, handled complaints, etc. Consequently, I knew most of the electrical contractors by their first names. One day in 1945 two contractors and NECA field representative George Seaman, Sr. approached me about going to work for the local chapter. Frankly, I did not know NECA existed and the chapter had been organized only about one year. Apparently they were disappointed with the then manager and had decided to replace him. I agreed to take the job but I had no background as to what the Association was for, what they could do or what they should do. Later, other managers told me my predecessor had commented if things are too quiet and everyone was happy he went out and stirred up some conflicts between contractors. Of course, in doing this purposely, his idea was he would be more in demand if there was trouble. I think this would be my number one point...if things are going smoothly, for God's sake leave them that way. Some member said he could talk on any subject and took credit for every chapter program. Apparently he had not learned the lesson you fellows learned long ago -- that is, lead from the rear. From the records and correspondence, etc. at the office it was my opinion he was capable but just did not have the right personality.

In 1969 George Peterson, a very successful manager of the Atlanta Chapter, now retired, spoke to the Institute. He gave a number of examples of what could be done for the chapter and he ended by asking "Is it good for George?" What he implied was that any activity or action that was good for the members and NECA was also good for the chapter manager. There is plenty of opportunity for you as a manager when you plan for the future to ask yourself the question regarding every item, "Is this good for the members, is this good for the chapter?" Day by day decisions should meet the same criteria.

The standard chapter bylaws provide for the President to chair meetings of the membership and the Board of Directors. They also provide that the directors shall set the policies of the chapter subject only to resolutions passed by the membership. The manager is delegated to

Good afternoon NECA Staff and Chapter Managers. It is certainly good to be with you today. Eight years have passed since I have been an active part of the NECA family; however, it has been my privilege to be your guest on two occasions - once when the meeting was in Dallas, Texas and more recently in San Francisco, where we surely had a ball.

Prior to 1940 the NECA staff was quite small and only a few so-called chapters existed. Services to the members were limited to the NECA Manual of Labor Units, a monthly magazine, a weekly newsletter, a limited amount of field service, and an annual convention. The war in Europe and the imminent coming of the Second World War indicated a need for more facilities to be used in the manufacture of war materials and other necessary items. The NECA Executive Board recognized the opportunity and need for expanding the membership and services of the Association. Paul Geary, a very successful manager of the Youngstown, Ohio Electrical Contractors Group was employed by NECA to assist with the expansion program. Under his leadership the organization of chapters throughout the country was accelerated and he assisted in getting the bylaws changed to require each chapter to have a full time manager who was not a contractor. A point I want to make is that Paul Geary, Executive Vice President, wisely promoted a chapter managers meeting with the NECA staff on a regular basis and continued strongly to support this Institute until he retired. We are grateful to Bob Higgins for his continued support of the Institute which I am sure all of you will agree is your most valuable tool. Your opportunity to meet and personally know chapter managers throughout the country and to have timely and stimulating programs enables you to give full service to your chapter members. When I was a manager I tried to emulate, as much as I could, these successful managers of whom there were many. As a matter of fact, I see some are still here and still making contributions to the electrical contracting industry.

How can a guy who has been retired for eight years make a decent contribution to a group of younger managers? I decided, basically, to relate to you some experiences and comments of other managers as well as my own. The late Ray Carey, Manager of Los Angeles County Chapter, in a talk before our group in Miami Beach in 1959 made a statement that we as managers operate a business and are in a better position than anyone to know the needs of a chapter and should be in a better position than anyone to plan so the chapter would be strong financially and beneficial to the members. I recall a statement made by Warren Penn, who preceded Ray as Manager of the Los Angeles County Chapter, that it was his hope and in his plans to make the chapter financially strong enough that dues would no longer be required. Undoubtedly he was thinking of a profit-making organization but, of course, that did not materialize.

carry out these policies and to act as chief executive officer. I am sure in your membership there are some who do not understand the difference between managing a business and managing an association. Sometimes the president does not understand that his duties do not include management decisions. Keep in mind that the president is the most important member of the chapter. Permitting the president to make decisions which should be made by the chief executive officer (manager) could easily create problems. These situations must be handled delicately but, for the good of the Association, they must be handled. Sometimes there are members who allege the president is really the manager and should this become a reality, then the manager is in trouble. During my tenure as a manager, one president who had a special interest pursued it vigorously. His interest was contrary to the best interest of the other members and of the chapter, so I had to oppose it. It meant nothing to me one way or another and it was not going to affect me. Still, I was responsible. He had to concede defeat and later came to me in a friendly manner, said he was resigning, and commented the president did not have the authority he had expected. On the other side of the coin, a manager should not try to be a dictator, and be careful not to give the appearance of being the big chief. I once knew a manager who did not even have a negotiating committee and then he indicated he ran the show. Eventually the wall fell in and he was no longer the manager.

It is my firm belief the manager has the responsibility for investigating alleged violations of the chapter's bylaws and other chapter activities such as bidding procedures, Fair Trade Practice Rules, etc. If a violation does occur and the manager is unable to resolve it, then a full report should be made to the appropriate committee or the board of directors. I am not referring to trivial things, but about a matter severe enough to disturb other members, as not paying all dues and assessments within the allowable time, or not complying with the specific articles of the bylaws. I feel you cannot afford to have other members saying, "If that - - - - doesn't pay all his dues, why should I?" Also, I firmly believe that, even if other members may not know about a violation, a manager is responsible for pursuing the infraction. I am talking about credibility--a must for a respected manager. Certainly, I do not believe a manager should go "witch-hunting."

An example of a violation of a chapter bylaw -- while we were in negotiations with local union and were not making progress and preparations were being made to go to the Council on Industrial Relations, a member contractor gave a note to all his union workmen stating he was placing in escrow the amount of increase requested by the union. When I learned of the matter, I attempted to persuade him to withdraw the arrangement but was unsuccessful. I invited him to a meeting of the Board of Directors to discuss this question but he would not change his plan. Then I told him this matter would be placed on the agenda for the membership meeting and what the alternative might be. He announced at the meeting he would not change his mind. Consequently, the chapter expelled him from membership. It was the manager's responsibility to process this violation by requesting the subject be placed on the agenda and to present the facts to each body; then my job was finished. As regrettable as it was, there could be no

doubt in the minds of the members that the Chapter Bylaws had to be respected. Several years later, this firm returned to NECA membership.

The chapter adopted Fair Trade Practice Rules within the first year of its organization. On several occasions a few members violated one or more rules. It was the manager's responsibility to get the problem resolved one way or another. If I was unable to correct the situation, the violation was referred to the Fair Trade Practice Committee. In which case, in the presence of the member, I presented the facts to the Committee who on several occasions imposed fines for the violation. No member ever violated a rule twice and it was seldom such action was needed. I do not say that imposing fines was the proper discipline, but every member who paid respected the procedure. The Department of Justice looked at the records on this subject and made no comment. Yes, there are times a manager must speak up -- for the sake of the chapter and the members.

Now, I am going to speak about the part of the manager's activities I loved best -- relations with others. When I speak of relations with others, I am including not only members and the NECA staff but also architects, engineers, city hall, labor, political leaders, and all other construction groups. This sounds like a large order and it is. It can't be done overnight but it can be planned and it can be executed and will be for the best interest of the chapter. You must remember you are the only representative of the electrical construction industry in your area and that's a grave responsibility. You know what it takes to do this; you know it requires integrity, sincerity, and frankness. Above all, we want to conduct ourselves so we will be respected. We know the first order is to be recognized and respected with the members and it is most difficult to set aside any particular procedure for individual members. Even managers have different ways of addressing situations. Members, for instance, can be on the scale from one end to another as far as to their interests, concerns, and objectives. One thing we know is that we must deal with them where they are; we must understand how they think; we have to consider what they actually think rather than what they probably should think. By knowing certain things about them we are in a better position to serve the chapter. It is not always easy. I recall when I became a chapter manager, one contractor really opposed me. From the first day he did not like me although we had known each other for several years. It was nearly five years later before he admitted to me and others he had been in error. However, I knew he had an employee whom he wanted to be the manager but he never admitted it to me. Fortunately, in the end and for the last 20 years of our association, he was 100% behind me. It took time and patience and some of you may have had the same experience. My solution is to just keep trying and hopefully you will be successful.

Labor Relations can be the most interesting and most frustrating activity. I know I am about eight years behind on this subject, so I will just dwell on it lightly. I did not believe in publicly

condemning the local union and discouraged chapter members from doing so. Criticisms should be aired privately in our contractors' meetings. The reason for this policy should be obvious because nothing would be gained by condemning employees knowing good and well we were going to continue working union people. I never missed an opportunity to assert that IBEW was one of the best and most respected unions. I was greatly disappointed to learn the "Council clause" had been removed from many of the agreements but I understand some parts of it are still effective. During my tenure I think I went to Council on 15 cases and never won a single time but by the same token I never lost a single one either. I honestly believe the Council came real close in every case to making the right decision. I realized the business manager was on the spot because the Union's recommendation he supported 100% and, no doubt, in their meetings he had much to say as to why they were entitled to what they asked, and I mean entitled to it and the conditions warranted what they requested was minimum. When the Council decision came to them and they got only a portion of what they asked for the business manager naturally had to explain. As you know logically the Council was blamed and this is, no doubt, why the IBEW voted to terminate the "council clause."

One of our most interesting and productive programs, gentlemen, is apprenticeship and training. It is a program you can enjoy. Whether you are a union member or a contractor, you have parallel objectives and that is to select and train skilled electrical workers.

Earlier I mentioned it was desirable for managers to know architects, engineers, general contractors, and some others, such as politicians. Community service work can be interesting and rewarding. A number of managers belong to service organizations and, frankly, I do think I was a better chapter manager for belonging to a service club.

I remember in 1960 one morning reading in the paper that the City Council the previous night had passed an ordinance changing the licensing requirement for residential work. At that time a home builder was on the Council and had been able to have the bill passed and read three times that night as an emergency measure and it went into effect the next day. I protested vigorously at the next Council meeting and got them to delay enforcement to allow me time to collect more data. I was able to get architects, engineers and other important people to write letters condemning the watered-down code for residential wiring. After my presentation, the ordinance was withdrawn. Immediately the manager of the Home Builders organization came to me and congratulated me. He wasn't mad; he was opposed to what I said and did, but he respected me. I had been reading articles by Jack Collins, Sr. who, at that time, was manager of the Chicago Chapter, on the subject of labor burden on labor only jobs. I had read other articles about separating bids on the electrical and mechanical work from the general contractors and the savings involved. At that time the Dallas Independent School District was taking bids on construction work through the general contractors. I went to a meeting of the School Board alone -- no electrical contractors, no mechanical contractors, no one else, and presented my story as to how the School District could save money based upon the material I had read in the Electrical Contractor

magazine and a couple of talks I heard on this subject. After awhile the Board members began talking about specific situations where there had been problems which separate contracts probably would have prevented. That very night the School Board voted to take separate bids on the electrical and plumbing work as well as on the general contracts. This policy remained in effect for 20 years until the union members began picketing school jobs and created considerable trouble so the general contractor was able to convince the then School Board that such labor problems could be avoided if everything was under one contract. On several occasions during those 20 years, general contractors had talked with me about making certain changes, perhaps as one mentions -- take separate bids then have the general take over the contracts from the School Board. Recently a general contractor was fined \$10,000 and given 10 years probation on a theft charge after he pleaded "no contest." The charges were fraud and theft. Separation of bids might have prevented this irregularity. Although this does take time, it is rewarding, especially your own satisfaction in doing the job.

Belonging to a service or civic organization for business purposes only is never recommended. One must want to devote some time and effort to community service. There is a favorable by-product, however. One is exposed to important people where your contribution is appreciated and recognized. For instance, one of my fellow club members was Board Chairman for Parkland Hospital. When plans were prepared for the new hospital in 1955, I spoke with him about separating bids, which he sold to the Board. When the new Dallas County Court House plans were being prepared in 1964, I discussed separation of bids with a top County official with whom I had served on the Dallas Camp Fire Girls Board. I was successful and considered it an accomplishment.

The fact you are here is evidence you like your job. Trade association work is interesting with enough problems to keep you on your toes and enough benefits to make the work attractive. During my years as a chapter manager, I was sure no other construction trade association compared with NECA. Being proud of your work and proud of your Association will make life happier. A complimentary word for the NECA staff. I thought it would be most difficult to hold a chapter together without the help, support, and services of the NECA staff.

It might be surprising as to how many contacts you had with the NECA staff during this past month. You all know the NECA Organizational Chart - your Chapter's Board of Governors' Member, your District Vice President serving on the Executive Committee, all having input into the Association's policy-making procedure -- very democratic -- resulting in a conservative and respected trade association. On numerous occasions I have heard NECA members from other chapters praise their managers. I was always proud to hear such compliments because they upgrade our profession. Believe me, I am proud to have been associated with our chapter members, you Managers, and the NECA Staff. I wish you continued progress.