

Insights from NIA's YPAC Mentor Program

NIA's YPAC continues its new and unique mentoring program, pairing NIA Past President Dana Vlk with YPAC member Dayna Martin. The two had virtual one-on-one sessions and then shared highlights of their conversations with the YPAC audience during NIA's Virtual Spring Summit.

STAYING POWER: Building Your Industry Brand

By Dayna Martin, Associate Marketing Manager, Johns Manville

In my rookie years, I can recall hearing about Dana Vlk, a highly respected leader in the industry; and because we shared the same name, I had a sense of validation that I had begun my marketing career in the industry. Little did I know, 13 years later, that I would still be in this industry. As another mentor of mine, Jack Bittner, often says, "The insulation industry is like Hotel California—you can check out anytime... but you can never leave." In fact, Jack Bittner introduced me to Dana Vlk at the 2017 NIA Insulation Expo event. I felt honored then to meet such a successful role model in the industry and was thrilled when NIA paired us in the YPAC mentorship program.

The timing of our mentorship pairing was incredibly fortuitous: Dana was right on the cusp of retirement and nearing the conclusion of her term as NIA's Immediate Past President. I feel extremely lucky to have been given the opportunity to mentor under her, learning from her 40 years of experience. We began our virtual-format conversations by discovering our shared interests in paddle boarding and baseball games. We moved on to cover topics ranging from how her initial job turned into a career, to how she benefited from her "Swiss Army™ knife" approach and how she paired her natural, lifelong learner mentality with genuine and purposeful networking to build her highly valued and respected professional brand in the insulation industry.

Utility Team Player: Swiss Army Knife Role

I believe all of us can (and should) think about our personality, attitudes, and strengths as a personal brand. One of my questions to Dana was what brand she would compare her own professional brand

to, and she easily said, "Swiss Army knife." Dana described herself as a utility player in her career, as she was a part of several mergers and acquisitions. She became comfortable with change and wearing multiple hats. She also had a strong self-awareness in knowing what her strengths were and what type of career she wanted. Perhaps even more importantly, she also knew what she did *not* want. Knowing what she wanted, embracing change, and learning new roles gave her a bold confidence coupled with an empathic mentality, which helped her establish respect and credibility throughout the industry and gave her the reputation of a well-qualified industry leader and mentor.

Lifelong Learner

Dana described herself as a lifelong learner. This, coupled with her ambition, allowed her to succeed in every role she was asked to do. With each responsibility, she added a new tool to her Swiss Army knife, and that included learning how to manage people based on what *their* goals were, not hers. Ambitious by nature, Dana thought others felt the same, but experience taught her to recognize that people have different definitions of success. She learned to support the pathway that they wanted for themselves so that the company retained these skilled people, and her employees were happier pursuing their passions. As her career matured and she gained more experience, she identified that sometimes additional skills were needed to facilitate a conversation or a professional relationship within her team. She also learned when she should and should not back down from a situation, and this knowledge played a key role in building her well-respected professional reputation.

The Importance of Networking and Utilizing Social Media

Dana's natural appetite for learning helped her build industry connections; and early on, she recognized the importance of networking. She not only found value in connecting with her key industry partners, but also saw the benefits of working together with the competition to help the industry grow. The natural way she built relationships supported her throughout her career as she was able to draw from her connections to support company and industry initiatives. While most agree that face-to-face events and interactions are ideal, the recent disruption to our "normal" way to connect in person has forced other tactics to become even more relevant. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter have provided the opportunity to continue to grow your network and build your professional and company brand without the face-to-face component. LinkedIn can serve as a digital business card and provide the necessary credibility to earn an introduction and grow your network. Your profile and activity can position you as a resource to your connections and oftentimes customers, supporting your professional brand.

Through the YPAC mentoring program, Dana and I explored many topics and experiences that contribute to building a career, which essentially equates to your professional brand. For Dana's brand, her continuously expanding knowledge and valued relationships allowed her to stand out in the insulation industry. I feel very fortunate to look to her, and other NIA members, as strong mentors as I move through the phases of my career.