

"A professional is someone who can do his best work when he doesn't feel like it."

- Alistair Cooke

(1908–) English journalist living in America and reporting on America to England

"A young boy was walking with his father along a country road. When they came across a very large tree branch the boy asked, "Do you think I could move that branch?" His father answered, "If you use all your strength, I'm sure you can." So the boy tried mightily to lift, pull and push the branch but he couldn't move it. Discouraged he said, "Dad, you were wrong. I can't do it." His dad said, "Try again." This time, as the boy struggled with the branch his father joined him and together they pushed the branch aside. "Son," the father said, "the first time you didn't use all your strength. You didn't ask me to help."

Advantages of Professional Memberships and Networking

Like any other group of professionals, we're always looking to build our professional networks, find career advice and uncover new industry resources. One way to further these goals is through becoming a member of a professional organization. The affiliation must not only provide a value to the individual, but should enhance or maximize the performance of the person to ultimately benefit the organization.

Some associations have membership counts in the thousands, and it can be difficult to navigate such a vast crowd. The size of the group also affects how successful you can be in making meaningful contact at an event such as an industry Congress.

Getting the most out of any professional association membership is like anything else in life -- you're going to get out of it as much as you put into it. Fortunately, there are some easy steps that you can follow to ensure that each of your association memberships is a success. Really think about what you're trying to get out of this membership. Why are you thinking about joining an association? The following are a few questions to consider:

- What are you hoping to accomplish?
- Is this about furthering your career? Is this about growing your business?
- Is it a social objective, or is it truly a professional objective?

Establishing clear objectives by answering these questions before you start assessing potential organizations will greatly benefit you in the long run. Ask yourself specific questions about why you are spending the time and identify objectives for your participation. We're fairly certain these two women will achieve what they're seeking because they have defined what they're looking for. Each time they attend a program meeting, they have their objectives in the back of their minds -- and are looking for ways to meet them.

You won't meet people by walking into a room of 500 to 1,000 association members and handing out business cards. You're not going to get specific career advice or develop potential business leads that way. Even though you might exchange business cards in that venue, it will be months before any kind of meaningful relationship is developed. The smaller committees and task forces that you will work on, the events you will help plan, the programs you will help coordinate by volunteering your time -- that's where you're really going to develop working relationships with other members.

By building substantial relationships, you will also learn more about the resources within the organization, as well as additional professional organizations that your new contacts are involved in that may be relevant to achieving your objectives.

Professional membership confers a special status on those who hold it. Memberships open a pathway to join the rapidly expanding world of the professional; members who are found around the country, as well as those in the international community of like-minded individuals and organizations. Membership presents opportunities for competition, professional recognition and access to educational forums.

The number of gymnastics business operations has more than tripled since 1972, and the industry continues to grow and change rapidly. Growth in our industry has thrust a major impact on our profession; an impact we will continue to feel. The number and variety of gymnastics related operations also continues to change. New jobs are appearing as the industry grows more complex. Coaches are more sophisticated in their thinking and even more specialized in their presentation. More is the operative word no matter where you look throughout the industry: more large organizations, more chains, more managerial positions and titles, more variety, more development of new opportunities, more women and minorities. Being a part of a professional membership organization adds up to more opportunity for you and your career development or advancement.

Typical Advantages of Professional Memberships:

- Large and prestigious organizational connections
- Access to the leadership in the industry
- Professional networking at local, regional, national, and international levels
- National publications
- Opportunity to attend Regional Conferences and National Congresses
- National, regional, and local seminars, workshops, and symposiums
- Professional Certification opportunities
- Web Sites - resources about the industry on the Internet
- Published and Internet Job Listings; service for members to post their resumes, review resumes for new employees, or look for a new job; jobs are typically posted for free as a service to members
- Vendor Resource Guides
- Local, national, and international competitions
- National and Local Awards and Honors
- Programmatic Accreditation for colleges and universities
- Member Services Center; sometimes via a toll free number
- Educational Grants for members
- Health and Life Insurance Programs
- Video Library
- Discounted merchandise rates
- Apprenticeship and Intern Programs

There are a number of professional membership opportunities in the gymnastics industry. USECA members are provided some unique benefits such as access to valuable resource manuals (Drills for Skills, Team Handbook, Conditioning and Training Guide, etc.), logo embroidered polo shirt

and monthly newsletter. Members can also take advantage of the Video Club and receive excellent educational information on tapes sent directly to them.

USA Gymnastics Professional members are able to participate in sanctioned events, receive Technique and USA Gymnastics magazine. Members can renew their safety certification requirement at no charge after the initial certification. Members have voting rights and also receive discounted admissions to Congress, meetings, workshops and events.

Members in both organizations gain valuable industry leads and contacts through regular newsletters and at special events. Job postings are provided for Members - giving them the inside scoop on employment opportunities. According to a 1998 research report by the John Hancock Insurance Company, while two out of three gym club owners report that they expect their business to expand, one of the greatest business concerns of gym owners is finding and retaining qualified employees. Meetings and events can be your springboard to new professional horizons. Your membership fees help support organization programs, events and operating costs, and play a big part in helping the membership grow.

There are lots of advantages to becoming a professional member. The true impact of a professional membership comes from your participation with the organization. Get involved. Once you've made the commitment to join the organization, make a personal commitment to helping that organization grow. By moving forward and personally helping the organization achieve its mission, you will immediately start to see the fruits of your labor.

When we say "get involved," we mean do more than simply attend meetings. Sign up to become more active in one of the organization's committees. Help plan an upcoming event. This is the way you will meet people and get traction on achieving those initial objectives.

Don't just join a professional organization so you can "claim" membership, placing a certificate on the wall or listing your membership in promotional material; involve yourself in the organization and take advantage of the networking opportunities. The more you engage yourself in the organization, the more you will receive from your participation. Be an ACTIVE member!

About the Author:

Michael A. Taylor is a USAG Kinder Accreditation for Teachers (KAT & MELPD) Instructor, serves on the USA Gymnastics PreSchool Advisory Panel, is a USA Gymnastics National Safety Instructor, serves on the USA Gymnastics Safety Review Board, is a USAG PDP I Video Clinic Administrator, an American Red Cross CPR/First Aid and Sport Safety Instructor, and an American Sport Education Program Coaching Principles (PDP II) Instructor. Michael is a Certified National Youth Sports Administrator; an Instructor for the Stanford University based Positive Coaching Alliance, a long-time member of the United States Elite Coaches Association and a former gym owner. He is currently a Senior Recreation Supervisor for the City of Menlo Park that includes the 1600 student Gymnastics program in Menlo Park, CA. A Certified Pool Operator and a licensed National Playground Safety Inspector, Michael is also the owner of Gym.Net, a Gymnastics Professional's Network of Educational, Business, Consulting, and Internet Services specializing in Gymnastics oriented businesses. Michael can be reached at:

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Next Month – *"Measuring Results in Gymnastics"*