

EXPERIENCE — LARRY MASLAND, CONCORD, MASS. CONSERVING ENERGY ON THE JOB

As a sixth grader on a weeklong field trip at a camp in New Hampshire, along with a group of classmates, I watched our instructor dig a hole in a pine forest. When he finished, he showed us layer by layer how the pine needles decomposed and returned to the soil to become nourishment for the trees. This ecological revelation that occurred 36 years ago subtly influenced my educational and career decisions.

Almost 20 years passed, and my boyhood ideals about contributing to environmental quality became buried in self-doubts about my ability to influence change. My friend Rachelle encouraged me to use chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to find a job. My doubts about getting an environmental job were great, but I took her advice and chanted to be an editor. I succeeded. I became a free-lance editor, working as an etymologist for the second edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*.

I loved the work. I remember riding in a car with a fellow SGI member and telling her about my marvelous experience and how happy I was. When I finished and awaited the praise and encouragement that I typically heard after describing this unparalleled benefit, she asked, “What do you really want to do?”

After insisting, rather unconvincingly, that being an editor was my destiny, I mumbled something about environmental work.

With this thought in mind as I chanted, a year and a half later I confidently decided not to renew my contract as an editor and dedicated 100 percent of my time to finding a job in which I could work to improve the quality of the environment. At the time I also held two environmental jobs, one research-oriented and the other, the Energy Conservation Service, people-oriented.

As an Energy Conservation Service auditor, I visited people in their homes and encouraged them to use energy efficiently. After a while I chose to do the Energy Conservation Service job full time because meeting and encouraging people one-to-one, for me, was similar to telling people about Buddhism.

In fact, I remember SGI President Ikeda has said that whenever we meet a person, we must treat it as our only opportunity to teach them about Buddhism through our actions. Having also read that faith equals daily life, I was all the more determined to do my best with each customer.

Taking this approach to my work, I began to get a lot of recognition in the form of letters from my customers to the sponsoring utility companies. I was honored as “auditor of the month” and two customers even arranged blind dates for me! — an unheard-of experience among my fellow auditors.

I eventually became a technical director and oversaw training and quality control of auditors for a large organization. Shortly before my first daughter was born, this organization lost its major contract, and I was told that I would be laid off. My Buddhist practice had so filled me with confidence that I had no doubt about finding an even better job.

Before leaving, I had accepted a position at a small utility company, where I did energy efficiency work not only for residential customers but also commercial and industrial customers. I had expanded my world of environmental work through energy efficiency.

My relationship with the person who had hired me deteriorated through the years. A few years later the company merged, and my boss was transferred to the corporate headquar-

ters in New Hampshire. I stayed at the local distribution company in Massachusetts, developed a wonderful relationship with my new boss and became an invaluable employee throughout the company.

Then, as fate would have it, my former boss met with me and told me my job would be under him again and if I wanted to keep it, I would have to move to New Hampshire. I commuted over 130 miles a day to a job where my boss hated me and wanted to get me fired.

Again I remembered a lesson from my Buddhist study. If a person is causing us to suffer, we can chant for that person's happiness in order to change the relationship. I began to chant for my boss' happiness and a new job.

With my long commute and child-care responsibilities, I was having a difficult time working eight hours a day. My boss gave me an ultimatum to tell him how I was going to fulfill this obligation. As I chanted for his happiness and the upcoming meeting with him, I realized that, among other things, I had to discuss our relationship.

At our meeting, which initially didn't go well, he spoke for almost 10 minutes during which time I looked at him with the compassion that chanting for his happiness had given me. After he calmed down, he told me that I should forget about everything that had happened in the meeting.

The company hired a new chief executive officer who initiated a program that I could only call corporate Buddhism. He required management to give up their command-and-control attitude and adopt an approach to their employees that would allow them to blossom in their jobs and contribute positively to the company. It reminded me of how in Buddhism we talk about everyone having a Buddha nature.

I received a significant raise with a potential for even more money. My now former boss and I were at the same level in the organization, and I was working directly for the president on a number of important strategic initiatives. I had essentially stopped looking for another job.

During this time, Massachusetts passed a law that restructured the electric industry. One section of the law required that utilities invest more money in energy efficiency—over \$100 million dollars a year for five years! I noticed in another section that a state agency, the Division of Energy Resources, had oversight and coordination authority for this money. I applied in late August and was offered the job, but the money was less than I was making. Six weeks later they offered me more than I was making at my current job. I took it.

I am now the program director for the Energy Conservation Service. I oversee the same program under which I did in-home surveys 15 years earlier. I also help draft the regulations and guidelines that will define our agency's role in providing oversight and coordination for energy efficiency. As the program director, I am responsible for redesigning the program so that it is more energy efficient. I work with more than 40 individuals representing different special interests, other state agencies and the legislature.

Since it provides invaluable guidance, I will reread President Ikeda's speech on soft power which he gave at the Kennedy School (November 1991 *Seikyo Times*), as I work with others to create a program that will be a model for promoting residential energy efficiency and improve the quality of the environment.

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