

## **Why join a professional society or HATS?**

One very clear answer was given by Dr. David Williams in a speech given at the 2009 HATS Professional of the Year Dinner on June 11.

A printed version of the speech is as follows.

### **New Beginnings Require New Partnerships**

By Dr. David B. Williams  
UAH President

In Huntsville there are not six degrees of separation; the degree of separation is a negative number – I know of no other place where so many people know so many others.

Life is all about connections, knowing the right people and creating the right network. So Huntsville is a great place to get started doing this

How do you know the “right” people? Have your own standards, stick to them and seek out those who meet or exceed those standards. As I hang around life longer I trust my gut more than my head in personal relations. It’s not infallible but given that most of us don’t even know ourselves in true depth, I think it’s much more difficult to try and analyze people in any kind of intellectual fashion

In setting those standards seek to stretch yourself. Never having failed means never having found your limits. Find your limits, fail gloriously, pick yourself up and learn from your failure. My academic life is a series of (unplanned) failures - each of which led me down an unplanned road, but opened doors I never knew existed.

For example, students I once taught now run national labs, companies and federal agencies. Colleagues now run other universities. Always assume that one day you might work for those who currently work for you.

Professions/ technical societies are a major source for networking, for finding the “right” colleagues. When I was a professional academic (as opposed to an administrator) I was a member of ten professional societies, including three international ones. Attending the meetings of those societies, I saw the best in my various disciplines, I listened and learned from the best, and I got to know many of the best. How do you know how well you’re doing unless you benchmark yourself against the best. My own career grew because of these societies, including the opportunity to serve on national and international committees, chair meetings, organize international conferences and become President of two of those societies. My own career development was inextricably tied to the technical societies’ success. Remember, the best form of workforce development is your own success. So remember that as you get involved in your own professional societies. Remember also that joining is not sufficient. As Woody Allen said 90% of life is just showing up. If you show up everyone knows who you are, so the networking begins.

Networking doesn't just connect you to people in the same company, job market, discipline, community or whatever. A good network transcends all of these. On Jan.17, 1961 Dwight D. Eisenhower's exit speech first coined the phrase "the military-industrial complex" - and in not so favorable terms, warning about its "unwarranted influence"! In Huntsville we are truly part of the military-industrial complex and in general I would argue that it has been good for this part of the country, being a catalyst for collaboration between the federal, state, industrial and educational communities. Collaboration between all these organizations is extraordinarily strong in Huntsville, continues to ensure the success of this community and will be responsible for our survival beyond this current economic down turn.

In this century we'll all change jobs multiple times; technology and business are in constant change. Change is in the air and, yes, you can change too! If you don't change with the times you are stagnant. "The day we stop looking is the day we die" (Al Pacino winning an Oscar as Lt Col Frank Slade). If you're professionally stagnant you're dead. So Continuing Education is a crucial part of the 21st century workforce. Professional organizations and universities are two of the major suppliers of continuing education. Not only that, we know now that you can generate new neurons by indulging in mental exercises. Use it or lose it! So stay educated and get ahead, stay educated and stay healthy, stay educated and live longer.

So let's summarize:

Life is all about connections, knowing the right people and creating the right network

Have your own standards, stick to them and seek out those who meet or exceed those standards. Fail gloriously by your own high standards

Professional - technical societies are a major source for networking,

If you show up, everyone knows who you are, so the networking begins.

Huntsville is a catalyst for collaboration between the federal, state, industrial and educational communities

Stay educated – you're never too old to learn more.