

COMMENTARY

LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

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“Woe is Me” is an oft heard refrain from many environmental health practitioners who perceive that their glasses are half empty rather than half full. Some proclaim they “get no respect,” moan their defeatism in publications and at various conferences, engage in the blame game, and ignore their individual responsibilities for solving perceived problems. They believe that their self inflicted woes can be solved by a “magic bullet” in the form of artificial recognition such as certification, or by an infusion of funding granted without regard for merit. They believe that talking to each other is doing something, and that someone else is going to remedy their problems. As in the title of a country-western song, this syndrome is “Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places.”

The “defeatist and blame someone else” attitude appears to have increased during this era in which environmental health and protection is a high priority issue demanded by the public and political leaders, and widely considered to be an entitlement. Thankfully, numerous outstanding environmental health practitioners have not fallen into the trap of defeatism and victimization, and continue to excel and gain recognition.

Why do many environmental health and protection practitioners excel and gain support while others simply complain?

- They possess necessary environmental health and protection competencies and are confident in applying their knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- They pursue a coherent vision for the field of environmental health and protection that provides a platform upon which to base and market their mission, goals, objectives, programs and recommendations.
- They have the commitment to change the status quo.
- They stand up for their beliefs.
- They engage in controversial issues as appropriate.
- They don’t rely on someone else to solve their problems.
- They recognize that talking to each other may be satisfying, but is not a solution to lack of recognition.

- They understand and utilize the public policy (political) process, rather than viewing it with disdain.
- They lead in developing, rather than simply reacting to, public policy issues.
- They consistently market the benefits of environmental health and protection including reduced disease and disability, improved quality of life, reduced health care costs, enhanced economic status, enhanced productivity, enhanced educational achievement, fewer social problems and a more livable environment.
- They routinely utilize the complex array of public information and networking possibilities essential for marketing their services and ensuring support.
- They do not blame someone else for their perceived problems. They look inward for solutions!
- They take “The Road Less Traveled” by thinking outside the box and being willing to be out of step with their peers. Pogo’s statement that “There go my people and I am their leader” is instructive about an all too common practice of leadership by polls and focus groups.
- They understand that recognition and support must be developed the old fashioned way. **They Earn It!**