

# My Journey Continues... "I Can"

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An email from a student member at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia was the inspiration for this column. Bandar Al-Anazi sent me an animated story about young students who literally bury the "I can't" statements in their lives, and replace them with "I can," "I will," and "I'm going to right away."

This story reminded me that SPE depends on the efforts of "I can" people. Our members keep this organization going by saying "I can" when someone is needed to serve as a section officer, review a paper, plan a conference program, mentor a young member, or take on any of the other multitude

of tasks that make SPE the vibrant society that it is.

In most associations, fewer than 10% of the members do almost all of the volunteer work. This hard-core group of "super" volunteers contributes many, many hours each year. I believe SPE does a little better than engaging 10% of our members, but we still tend to turn to the same people over and over again. It is a natural tendency for us all to call on those we know when we need something done. But the consequences are that we risk burning out our tried-and-true people and we miss out on the chance to tap into new talent and resources. We can do a better job of inviting members to serve and letting them know about the opportunities we have for volunteers.

The decision to volunteer is usually a two-step process—a person thinks generally about becoming a volunteer and then a "trigger event" transforms this general thought into concrete action. The "trigger" is often something very simple: someone they know asks them to volunteer in a specific role, or they learn about an opportunity through a general announcement at a meeting, on a form, or in a newsletter.

In my experience, a personal invitation to a specific member nets the best results. Recently, Behrooz Fattahi, who serves on our Editorial Review Committee as co-Executive Editor of *SPE Reservoir Evaluation & Engineering*, needed additional peer-review help. He obtained a list of members who had indicated on their dues statements an interest in peer review and their field of expertise, and sent invitation letters to them. He got an overwhelmingly positive response, including many comments that they had never been asked before to serve and were pleased to do so!

The heavy workload that energy professionals have these days and some demographic shifts are causing us to re-think how we structure our volunteer assignments. The first questions most people ask if invited to serve on a committee is, "how much time will this take." We've got to find ways to be more flexible in how we organize assignments—these might include short-term projects, simplified jobs, job sharing (two volunteers to handle an assignment), and virtual volunteer jobs conducted online. We use phone conferences and email to conduct most of our business, and these help to reduce the time commitment so people are willing to participate.

Younger volunteers are looking for positions that will increase their skills, so we need to show them how volunteering in SPE builds their professional and technical skills. In addition, we must find ways to keep our retired members active and involved in SPE. We need their experience and wisdom more than ever.

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