
MANA Members Mentor Undergrads

The more than 1,600 independent manufacturers' representatives who have gained MRERF's CPMR designation have long touted the benefits they and their agencies derive from adding those prestigious four letters to the end of their names. Most often cited are:

- Plentiful networking opportunities with reps from a variety of industries.
- A more complete knowledge of what they've chosen for their careers.
- An immediate increase in their professionalism and in their status as businessmen involved in sales.

Added to that list recently has been the opportunity to give back to the profession that has meant so much to each of them.

CPMR is short for Certified Professional Manufacturers' Representative. The program was created especially for manufacturers' representatives and brokers after nearly a decade of research and development, and with the cooperation of a variety of representatives' trade groups. To become a CPMR, each candidate must attend three levels of on-campus classes, totaling 24 hours at each level of study. The entire curriculum can take between three to five years to complete

At the urging of MANA-mem-

ber Charley Cohon, CPMR, Prime Devices, Inc., Chicago, Illinois, CPMRs were contacted, and with very little urging, many volunteered to participate in the coaching/judging activities of Pi Sigma Epsilon (PSE), the only national professional fraternity in marketing, sales management and selling.

Half Century of Service

The Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based PSE was founded more than 50 years ago with one of its stated goals to establish a "collegiate organization to assist members in developing sales and marketing skills through lifetime opportunities." Playing a major role in meeting that goal has been the creation of the fraternity's regional and national sales competitions for college undergraduates interested in the profession. It's at these scheduled competitions that undergrads learn the latest sales strategies, practice selling techniques and receive training from sales professionals. That's where CPMRs come in — thankfully.

According to Cohon, who serves as MRERF's vice president of research and special projects, "Once I learned about PSE, I contacted them with the intention of asking how we (CPMRs) might



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contribute to a ‘raising of the bar’ of our profession.”

One of the areas that Cohon and PSE Executive Director Ann Devine identified was the organization’s sales coaching/judging function at its regional and national sales competitions. During these competitions for undergrads, sales professionals are needed to coach students on their techniques. In addition, judges were needed during afternoon sessions in order to evaluate sales presentations.

“Generally we have about 20-25 students competing at the regional level and more than 70 at our national competition,” explained Devine. “Because we had a shortage of coaches, we often had two students for each coach. As a result of Charley’s offer, ap-

proximately 50 percent of our coaching needs were covered with CPMRs. In addition to the quantity of volunteers, however, the CPMRs provided quality. The CPMRs who worked with our students have been in positions where they’ve been selling for years. They provided our students with excellent professional advice.”

Cohon adds, “We were able to address a situation where there was a deficit, and we were able to make it whole. Everyone I contacted to volunteer was more than happy to take my call. Not all could volunteer because of their schedules, but they all recognized the importance of the effort.”

By their actions, two manufacturers’ representatives that appreciated the effort were Gary Brusacoram and Tom Vollmer — naturally both are CPMRs.

Carrying the Torch

According to Brusacoram, Andrews-Johnson-Brusacoram, Minneapolis, Minnesota, who serves as MRERF’s president, “A volunteer effort such as this shows how CPMRs carry the torch for our profession. The volunteers who worked on this are among those who are truly passionate about what they do and what they believe in. This whole experience was very gratifying for a number of reasons, not the least of which was it exposed me to something I didn’t know existed. I didn’t know about PSE or their efforts in educating students about the sales profession. It’s something I plan on continuing.”

Echoing those sentiments was Vollmer, Orenstein-Vollmer Assoc., Inc., Minneapolis. Vollmer notes that the volunteer effort was a good fit because

“These students are interested in selling, and nobody does selling better than CPMRs. It was a perfect fit. CPMRs brought the experience, and the students provided the interest, enthusiasm and initiative. It couldn’t have worked out better.”

He adds that it worked so well that “Not only would I recommend the activity to other CPMRs, but I plan on continuing to work with them in the future.”

While schedule conflicts prevented MANA-member Kurt Nelson, CPMR, Nelson & Assocs., Santa Fe Springs, California, from volunteering his time during the first year of the CPMRs’ involvement with the PSE coaching program, he’s on the list for future participation. “I’ve learned that giving back to our profession is one of the things I enjoy the most. Over the last couple of years, I have come to learn that there is a tremendous amount of satisfaction in giving your time and talent to help others. In addition, the PSE program is especially valuable given the fact that while everyone in our industry is eager to provide product training, there is a huge void when it comes to selling skills training. That’s why the PSE and its coaching/judging program is so worthwhile.”

The reps’ enthusiasm for giving back to their professions was matched by PSE’s Devine, who noted, “I was surprised and gratified that MRERF and the CPMRs would take such an interest in what we’re doing. I look forward to continuing the effort.”

Those seeking additional information concerning this educational effort may visit Pi Sigma Epsilon’s web site at www.pse.org or MRERF at www.mrerf.org. □