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Irvin Sam Schonfeld
CUNY Graduate Center

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The *Newsletter of the Society for Occupational Health Psychology*: A History and One or Two Things I've Learned

Irvin Sam Schonfeld, The City College of the City University of New York

The weather in Miami was beautiful. The temperature was in the low 80s, and the humidity, unusually low. It was March 2006 and I was at the "Work, Stress, and Health" meeting. During a break between sessions, I walked outside to enjoy a cup of coffee with Larry Murphy of NIOSH. Peter Chen, who had just begun his term as president of the Society for Occupational Health Psychology, was, during a break, passing around a sheet of paper asking people to volunteer for a variety of organizational roles. I looked at the sheet while enjoying my coffee with Larry. One organizational role was that of editor of SOHP's yet-to-be-created newsletter. A little later in the day I told Peter that I would volunteer. Peter and I soon had a follow-up discussion that had an element of the Judy Garland-Mickey Rooney "Let's put on a show" shtick. Except our "show" was directed toward producing a newsletter.

I had several motives to volunteer. First was my wish to advance the field of occupational health psychology and our one-year-old society. I also had a selfish motive: I wanted to get to know the members of the organization better. I saw myself as an outsider, having completed my doctorate in developmental psychology. The modal member of the society comes from I/O psychology and attends SIOP meetings. I'm more likely to attend meetings of the American Educational Research Association. Finally, I thought that editing the newsletter could be as personally satisfying as conducting research and teaching.

In a follow-up discussion, Peter and I talked about the function of newsletters in organizations and scientific societies. In the next few months, I discussed plans for the newsletter with various members of SOHP and spent time reading newsletters published by several organizations including the Brunswik Society and Divisions 7 and 15 of APA. I also knew that I would need help. I needed associate editors. My first recruit was Joe Hurrell, a scientist at NIOSH whom I have known from past Work, Stress, and Health meetings, and who in January 2010 became editor of the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*,

I also recruited Kizzy Parks, a graduate student at the time and the incom-

ing editor of a student journal. I met Kizzy in 2006, when I was preparing to present at the annual meeting of the Association for Psychological Science (APS) in New York City over the Memorial Day weekend. As it happened, I was part of a group screening proposals for SOHP flyers designed to recruit new members. I wanted to distribute the flyers among the APS conference attendees. I got in touch with several SOHP members to learn who else would attend. One of my contacts mentioned that Kizzy was going. I emailed her to ask for her help with the flyers. She agreed and we met for the first time at the APS conference. We coordinated our efforts in getting out the flyers. I thought we worked well together. That summer, I asked her to be an associate editor. In fact, for the first issue of the newsletter I asked her to write an article with me on our experience attempting to recruit new SOHP members at the conference.

I knew Janet Barnes-Farrell from past WSH conferences, and I had learned that she knew more about publication software than I did. In the fall of 2006, I asked her to serve as production editor. She in turn asked University of Connecticut graduate student Kim Davies-Schrils to also serve as production editor. Our first issue was published in May 2007. Its name,the *Newsletter of the Society for Occupational Health Psychology,* may not be sparkling but it's to the point.

Like a baseball club, the composition of the team changed as time wore on. University of Connecticut graduate student Leslie Golay joined the *Newsletter* staff as production editor in time for our second issue in January 2008. Kim Davies-Schrils left after that issue to devote more time to other projects. Joe Hurrell retired from NIOSH, and wanted to retire from the *Newsletter*. I asked him to stay on for one more issue and he was good enough to stay on for our third, which we published in May 2008. Meanwhile, I canvassed members of the SOHP executive committee to recommend someone to replace Joe as associate editor. Jennifer Bunk of West Chester University was mentioned. Fortunately, she joined us and helped prepare our fourth issue, which we published in October 2008.

Because we are all volunteers, our newsletter workload competes with our main employment. After the fourth issue, I asked my two associate editors if they would mind if I brought a third associate editor on board. They responded that they would be pleased. I happened to know Alfred Rosenblatt, managing editor of *IEEE Spectrum*, the magazine published by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, and an engineer himself. Recently retired, he had a reputation for being an excellent editor. He was interested in doing volunteer work, and had volunteered some of his time to help disadvantaged high school students learn about adult careers. I had talked to him informally about one or two editorial matters and was impressed with his judgment. With the approval of the SOHP Board, I invited him to become an associate editor. Al joined the staff, bringing the number of associate editors to three, and helped with our fifth (January 2009) issue. Lori Francis, of St. Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, agreed to become an associate editor, starting with the current issue. Tim Bauerle, a graduate student at the University of Connecticut, volunteered to become our third production editor, beginning this issue.

The essential ingredient of a newsletter—or any publication—is content. My main efforts are directed at getting individuals in our field to contribute articles. I soon learned, however, that it is not enough just to ask. I learned to use email and telephone diplomacy to follow up, remind, and, yes, even cajole.

Actually, more than diplomacy is involved. There is editing, and there is grappling with a difficulty without flinching. One of the first difficult editorial decisions I had to make was to tell SOHP president Peter Chen that I was unhappy with the column he wrote for our inaugural issue. I consider Peter a friend; we met at the first WSH conference in Washington in 1990. A misprint in the program had indicated that someone named Peter Cohen was presenting an interesting paper on negative affectivity. I was also working on the subject and wanted to learn more about this Cohen fellow's work. I soon discovered that Peter Cohen was really Peter … (continued on page 17)

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The *Newsletter of the SOHP* (cont'd.)

(continued from page 16) … Chen. Over drinks we had a good laugh about the misprint in the program, and became friends. It is difficult to tell a friend something bad about what he or she has written. In fact, in publishing, there is a saying that goes something like "Never get a friend to read your manuscript. Always get an enemy."

I knew I had to put sentiment aside when it came to editorial matters. I felt I had an obligation to the *Newsletter* to tell Peter that his original article was too formal, too stiff. I asked him to rewrite it and make it more personal. Peter rewrote the brief article, and hit a home run with the bases loaded. His piece was superb, one of my favorites. It concerned Peter's work at a company that had just retrenched and dismissed a number of employees (http:// sohp.psy.uconn.edu/ SOHPNewsletter11.pdf).

While Peter was walking through the parking lot with a colleague laid off that very day, the colleague gave voice to the emotions he was feeling. After half an hour, the colleague developed a severe stomachache. Peter described the piercing experience of looking into his colleague's eyes and for the first time seeing the pain that was often embedded in data that are so carefully organized in the SPSS system files that Peter analyzed. Peter felt embarrassed at having missed the true meaning behind the data on work and stress. The experience led Peter to resolve, as he wrote in his column, to "do a better job to protect and promote the safety, health, and well-being of workers."

We hardly ever send back articles to be rewritten. I simply tell the associate editors not to be awed by a contributor's curriculum vita. Read the manuscript, I say, and edit like heck to make it work better. Make whatever changes are needed to improve the article. If the writer winds up looking good, we have done our job well.

How do I find contributors? One thing I do is look in the mirror and say, okay, you're a contributor, write an article. Or I call an associate editor. But I can't do that very often. Recruiting the editorial staff to be standby writers is not an efficient way to get content because we are all busy just editing. Rather, I follow the motto, "You won't get if you don't ask."

Accordingly, I started two series of

articles for which I personally recruit contributors. One series is devoted to NIOSH research projects relevant to OHP; I chose such a series because I want to showcase the efforts of NIOSH. The series began in our first issue and appears in alternate issues. The other series I initiated began in the third issue; each article covers a different OHP graduate program. I thought it was important to spotlight such programs, particularly for undergraduate readers thinking about applying to a graduate program. I ask faculty in leadership positions to recruit graduate students to write the articles.

I also want the *Newsletter* be concerned with the history of OHP itself. Because we are now archived in *PsycEX-TRA*, that history will be available to future occupational health psychologists. I have commissioned articles on the history of both SOHP (http:// sohp.psy.uconn.edu/ SOHPNewsletter2007.htm) and EA-OHP (http://sohp.psy.uconn.edu/ SOHPNewsletterV7October2009.pdf). In the current issue Robert Feldman writes about the beginnings of our discipline, and the origin of the term *occupational health psychologist*. In a future issue, I plan to publish a history of the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*.

I have other sources of articles, as well. For example, Bob Sinclair, who just stepped down as president of SOHP, suggested creating an Across-the-Pond series in which a member of the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology writes for our newsletter and an SOHP member writes for the EA -OHP newsletter. In that way we get intercontinental coverage. Periodically, I ask SOHP committee members to report on committee activities. I also get inspiration from news stories in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. The news stories led me to recruit individuals to write about the mental health of 9/11 responders (see Craig Katz's article in our fourth issue, http://sohp.psy.uconn.edu/ SOHPNewsletterV4October2008.pdf), the impact of the recent economic downturn (see Tahira Probst and Lindsay Sears's article in our fifth issue, http://sohp.psy.uconn.edu/ SOHPNewsletterV5January2009.pdf), and suicide in the military (see the article by Margo Genderson, Mark Kaplan, Michael Lyons, and me in our sixth issue, http://sohp.psy.uconn.edu/

SOHPNewsletterV6May2009.pdf).

Once I recruited a contributor by virtue of an accidental meeting. I asked Jeanne Stellman to cover the September 2008 Québec conference organized by the International Commission on Occupational Health - Work Organisation and Psychosocial Factors (ICOH-WOPS). Unfortunately, she got sick at the last minute, and could not attend. I only learned of her absence after I arrived in Québec. I wanted the *Newsletter* to cover the ICOH-WOPS conference. Luckily, just before the conference started, I had lunch with Alan Jeffrey, an organizational consultant from Kitchener, Ontario. Based on our lunchtime conversation, I recognized that he knew a good deal about work, stress, and health. At the end of lunch—for dessert, you might say—I asked him to write a piece about the conference and he agreed.

Paul Landsbergis, was also at the conference, but was tied up with multiple obligations. I asked Paul to act as a fact checker for Alan. I also pitched in by doing the photography for the conference coverage—I'm an amateur photographer and occasionally I take photos for the newsletter. The article was written and to this day I appreciate Alan Jeffrey's spot reporting.

While readying the fifth issue of the *Newsletter* (January 2009), I received a request from Pamela Perrewé to include a book announcement. We had never published one and I felt a degree of conflict of interest because I had written a chapter that would be published in a book in the same series. I brought my dilemma to the attention of the SOHP Executive Committee. The committee decided the *Newsletter* could publish book announcements if the book is edited or written by a member of SOHP. In the *Note from the Editor* I wrote for the fifth issue, I treated book announcements as a new member benefit and that book announcements would be a regular feature.

I also canvass SOHP committee chairs for membership-related stories and Society members who I think could write about, say, research-related resources the membership may want to use. When I do the canvassing, I like to say to a potential contributor that it is okay if he or she does not have anything to report now, but to keep me and the *Newsletter* in mind in the future. Every one of our …

"**Make whatever changes are needed to improve the article. If the writer winds up looking good, we have done our job well.**"

The *Newsletter of the SOHP* (cont'd.)

… contributors feels pressure at work to publish and to mark student papers. I don't want to add to the pressure. I want to create enough good will so that the individual might contribute an article at a later date if he or she cannot oblige me for the next issue. I'm not only shepherding the upcoming issue. I also have to keep in mind that I need material for future issues as well.

There is one place where I have not succeeded and would like to do better. I have had only limited success in soliciting articles from our readership. I have ended each of my *Editor's Welcomes* with a request for articles from our readers, as well as a set of *Guidelines for the Submission of Articles*. The *Guidelines* spell out the kinds of articles we would like to publish. I have also requested articles through the OHP Listserv. I've gotten one article through these appeals.

In closing, I'll summarize some points I have found helpful in publishing the *Newsletter*.

1. Look widely for contributors. A newsletter demands content.

2. Edit each and every article. Don't let a contributor's prominence interfere with your editorial goals and sensibilities.

3. Read quality publications and daily newspapers. News stories can inspire relevant articles.

4. Get plenty of support because you can't do it all yourself. A newsletter needs associate editors and production editor to keep running.

5. Include photographs.

6. Create good will by not overdoing the pressure on contributors. Pursue them if they're late but be diplomatic.

7. People make mistakes, including the contributors, the writers, and me; be forgiving.

I thank Jennifer Bunk and Al Rosenblatt for their suggestions regarding this article.

Society for Occupational Health Psychology

"Edit each and every article. Don't let a contributor's prominence interfere with your editorial goals and sensibilities."