

Jim Essey

On Giving Back and Giving 110 Percent

Diligence. Dedication. Dynamic energy. That's what ASA members can expect from 2004 chairman of the board Jim Essey, according to two leaders of the New York Association of Temporary and Staffing Services who have worked with him.

"Jim really understands our industry and cares a great deal about it," says Norma Menkin of Gainor Staffing. "He's an inspiration."

Adds Pat Rohe of Custom Staffing, "Jim is a hard worker with boundless energy—a tremendous asset to our industry."

"I believe strongly in giving back to things that have been good to me," Essey says. "And this industry has put food on my table, and my family's table, for more than 40 years."

Essey is president and CEO of the TemPositions Group of Cos., which has operations in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and California. His service to the staffing industry includes four and a half terms as NYATSS president. A member of the ASA board of directors, Essey served as first vice chairman in 2003, and he was sworn in as ASA chairman at Staffing World in October.

Something Other Than Staffing

Essey says that growing up, he definitely planned to enter the staffing industry, in the footsteps of his father, Richard Essey, who founded TemPositions. He just didn't know when.

"Sometimes the only ideas in a family business come from the family," he says. "But I have to give my dad credit: He

thought it would be great to get outside ideas."

So Essey sought external stimuli. He started with a solid education, spending a year at the London School of Economics and earning an MBA from Harvard University.

And then, "I worked in a totally different industry for six years—with the intent of learning as much as I could to bring ideas to our company," he says. "It worked out great. I think trying a different industry is good advice for anyone."

Today, although his career is focused on staffing, Essey continues to get—and give—ideas in other arenas. For him, taking a break often means tackling issues or projects outside TemPositions.



By Luanne Crayton

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“The United States affords opportunities you can’t get anywhere else,” he says, “but some people have more opportunities than others. I like to give back and to help others better themselves or have better opportunities. And I look for areas where I can make a specific contribution.”

Essey sits on the boards of a number of civic associations, including the New York City Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program and the NYC Young Presidents’ Organization. Referring to the business leaders who are members of YPO, he says, “They’re very successful people—super-talented, lucky people.” He encourages them to give back through soup kitchens, park cleanup efforts, and other initiatives.

He also just finished three years as president of the parent-teacher association of his daughter’s elementary school. It’s a unique school, not under governance of a school board or trustees, and Essey saw an opportunity to contribute. “I felt my business background would help it get through some budget and facility issues,” he says.

“You have to weigh what’s important and be prepared to know what the trade-off is. Maybe I won’t personally have time to open a new office or launch a new marketing program for my company. But for me, trying to help others is equally as important.”

‘Paddling for Our Lives’

In addition to diligent and dedicated, one might describe Essey as daring, after this adventure: “Last year, a group of friends and I went white-water rafting—in Iceland.” Setting the scene, he says, “We met at 6

a.m., and drove for an hour and a half to the middle of nowhere.

“I remember standing on top of a mountain looking at the river below,” he says. It was a raging river, thanks to warm weather and melting glaciers. “Who knew what could happen to us?”

“I’m not as young as I used to be,” he says, “but we got through it—a whole bunch of 40-year-olds paddling for our lives.”

In retrospect, he says he wonders whether taking on those rapids in “little rubber boats” was the smartest thing he’s ever done.

Busy Year

Essey learned from his father to give 110 percent to get something done or to not take it on at all. And he’s motivated by working with others who are dedicated to a common goal, such as improving the staffing industry. He’ll bring the same work ethic and motivation to his role as ASA chairman, setting his sights on five goals.

First, rebuild enthusiasm in the industry. “We’ve been through some tough times,” he says. “People are disappointed and disillusioned, and they’re asking themselves if they should stay in the industry. The answer is yes! Businesses can’t operate without us, and there’s definitely a place for our industry in helping the economy to improve.”

Second, help the industry continue to fine-tune its image. Things have changed since the days of the Kelly Girl, he says. “In every segment of the workplace, people are filling temporary positions—and not just at an entry level. But the public still doesn’t necessarily know about the flexible workforce. Businesses need to know the value of flexibility, and temporary employees should feel good about themselves and their jobs.” The result will be a double benefit, he says: Flexible opportunities in the workplace will increase, and more people will consider careers as temporary employees.

Third, strengthen ASA’s chapter network to address legislative threats at the grassroots level. “Legislative challenges tend to be initiated at the local level rather than the federal level,” he explains. “This makes it critical to find out about them. Local networks have the ability to be watchdogs for adverse legislation. They need to be strong and have help and leadership so that we can continue to improve legislative advocacy and education.”

Fourth, broaden the reach of the association in the ever-diversifying staffing industry. “Different segments of the industry have different needs,” he says. “We as an association need to understand those needs so that we can provide resources in those areas.” He adds, “I’m very excited about ASA’s new Technical, IT, and Scientific Section.”

Fifth, spark an increase in volunteerism. “People think they’re too busy, and need to work on their businesses and not the industry,” he says. “But we need to recognize that the issues we face are potentially dangerous and could put us out of business. We need to work together, and our own businesses will benefit.”

Essey will rely on pearls of wisdom from his father, who served as ASA chairman exactly 30 years ago. “He tried to get out as much as possible and see the members and understand where they were coming from,” Essey says. “I plan to do the same.”

Essey’s fellow New Yorkers expect a productive year from the ASA chairman—but not one of all work and no play.

“Jim takes things very seriously, but he has a great sense of humor,” says Rohe. “He’s a lot of fun to be around.”

Menkin concurs, commenting on their service as NYATSS leaders: “We had fun, but we did a lot to promote the industry.”

She adds, “Jim really understands the issues that we face as an industry. We are so fortunate to have him to present our face to the world as we want to be seen.” ■

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