



Thanks to the extraordinary commitment and expertise of AHLA leaders, the American Health Lawyers Association continues to thrive and serve as the essential health law resource in the nation. The Association's strong foundation reflects a history that is vibrant, meaningful and worth sharing. Finding a way to preserve AHLA's history was especially relevant in light of the Association's 50th Anniversary, which was celebrated throughout 2017.

This transcript reflects a conversation between AHLA leaders that was conducted via audio interview as part of the Association's History Project. More than 60 of AHLA's Fellows and Past Presidents were interviewed. A video documentary was also prepared and debuted on June 26 during AHLA's 2017 Annual Meeting in San Francisco, CA.

March 8, 2017

Tom Hyatt interviewing Peter Leibold:

Tom: This is Tom Hyatt. I'm a partner at the law firm Denton's in the Washington DC office and it's my great pleasure and privilege this morning to introduce Peter Leibold. Peter is the former executive vice president and chief executive officer of AHLA 00:02:28. We could easily spend seven days chatting with Peter and really getting to the good stuff but sadly we only have ten to fifteen minutes available for our interview this morning. Peter, welcome, and let's jump in.

Peter: Sounds great, thanks Tom.

Tom: Peter, you were the third ever executive vice president and chief executive officer of AHLA. What was that experience like for you? How did it feel when you came in through the doors of AHLA for the first time?

Peter: I was very excited to come in, but I also felt like I kinda had a stewardship responsibility. I had enormous respect for the two previous CEOs. They had done a terrific job. David was the founder and really entrepreneurial finding a niche for an association of health lawyers that really had not existed prior to 1965 when they passed Medicare and Medicaid. And so I just had enormous respect for his vision, for how he formed it. And then my immediate predecessor had done a great job of putting the association on strong financial footing and had really ... In every organization there's founder syndrome. When vision is there, but it's a different skill set to put an organization from founding an organization. She just did a terrific job of giving it that solidity. I felt enormous responsibility to the membership, to the staff, to continue to act to make it stronger, to lead it into a future, a third iteration of where the organization should go.

Tom: Indeed. There is [inaudible 00:04:40] for your predecessor there. When you first came on board, Peter, what did you feel like your initial mission was? What was the first order of business for you taking over the range of AHLA?

Peter: It was twofold. The first was to create a culture ... you'll remember that when I came, the two predecessor organizations, both of which David had had a hand in founding, had merged recently in 1997. And they did have different cultural feelings to them. And that was very apparent to me as I came in, and I think it was one of the reasons why they asked me to come in. So that was kinda the meta mission, was to blend the cultures into a successful organization, not alienating either group, and really uniting them. So that was the meta. Then the micro was

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that they, in part I think to facilitate the blending of the two organizations, had grown deficits in the two previous years, or at least the previous year. I can't remember if it was two years or a year. And when I got on, I realized that it had some financial challenges. And Marilou really had done a terrific job, and had really put it on solid. But the merger was a different thing. And it required more expenditures than I think they had expected.

And so those were my first two big priorities. Was one, get it back into black at operations. And two, begin forming a culture that the leadership of both organizations would welcome and think was the proper culture to move forward into a future that they could be proud of.

Tom: And definitely different cultures. Of course I was around in those days back when dinosaurs roamed the earth as well. And different cultures, what was your sense of the difference between the academy folks and then the national [inaudible 00:06:48] folks?

Peter: I think because of the way each was formed. And it was my understanding, it was passed on to me by leaders like you and others that were serving back then, that the academy was more of a membership-driven organization. It was because you didn't have this report from the AHA because you were a smaller pod in their machine. And so it was really member driven. And the NHLA, on the other hand, David Greenberg had left the AHA to form that. And he and people that he hired, like Anne Hoover, they had really created a strong infrastructure. And Marilou had simply added to that. So the NHLA was more staff driven, which was not to denigrate the members, but they had a very qualified staff that they then delegated a lot of work to. So the real goal was to blend those two cultures so that the member-driven organization did not feel like members were not having the proper impact, but also wanting it professionally through a staff that could deliver more benefits than a member-driven organization.

Tom: And ripping off of that, Peter, how did you see the association grow during your ten-year? First off, quickly remind us how long you were the CEO?

Peter: I was the CEO for 15 years.

Tom: So that's a great run, and longer than David and Marilou I think. Or at least certainly Marilou, probably close to David's anyway. But how did you see the association grow during your tenure?

Peter: I certainly think that we developed a common culture. And that ... I was proud of, that it was a culture that I think everyone united behind, and the notion of their being different cultures disappear. I think that the organization became much stronger financially, that we really had a good, solid bottom line from which we could provide more benefits. I believed that, during that time ... And this is really how we meld the culture. The practice groups became really strong, and significantly added to the culture of the organization. And they, by definition, were more member driven.

So the way we did it was we kinda combined the best of both organizations. And by having a vibrant practice-group culture, those who were in the academy saw that they were having and needing them to have a significant impact in the leadership of the organization. But we've blended that with a really strong staff that continued and added to benefits that were provided. We grew in membership significantly during that time period. So there was growth in membership, there was a vibrant practice groups, the programs continued to meet the high standards that they always have been. And it was hard to improve on the programs. David Greenberg and Marilou and the staff had just done a great job with that. I feel like we

maintained the value of that. And we just added benefits. We added ... We strengthened the weekly, we put it online, we added a daily. We just tried to feed the ferocious appetite of you and others in the health law bar that needed stuff on top of what was going on ...

Tom: Speaking of the health care bar, Peter, you were the CEO of an association of lawyers. And remember fondly a posting by our colleague and friend Bill Horton, when you transitioned out, saying that the job of being a CEO of an association of 10,000 plus lawyers, or that you had 10,000 members who thought that they were, A, smarter than you, and B, could do the job better than you. (laughs) What was that like?

Peter: A lot of people have commented on that, and I don't know ... I think health lawyers, I always did think, and just confirm me, health lawyers are a different kettle of fish. I think that would have been really true if I had been in charge of a litigation association. But I'm telling you that the health lawyers that I knew ... You know there were obviously exceptions, and I could go into them ... I had difficult members, and we had some consternation [inaudible 00:11:34] but for the vast, vast majority of them, they were as nice as could be. They were congenial, convivial, collegial. We worked through issues, but I got the feeling we were working together. I never felt like cross purposes with our membership. And because this was their way to give back to the community and to the profession, they were absolutely in their most relaxed state. I always loved that comment cause it made the job seem like, I was overcoming all these obstacles. But there really weren't that many. True membership is just really, really nice and it's just my guess is our members were very different in their interaction with me and the staff. And they were even with colleagues in their own firms because this was their professional organization, not the way they made their living.

Tom: True. Well very collegial bar, I agree. And sharing I thought was always a pretty big aspect of our healthcare bar ... that how there's a ... perhaps hold their cards closer to the vests, but in the healthcare bar, you practically give away the store. You'd be happy to share everything you had with anyone on request.

Peter: It was great. I always loved how generous our members were [inaudible 00:13:01]. Even when they had to compete for clients. It's an example of a professional organization and how it should function.

Tom: I will note for the record here, Peter, that you had the ultimate card to play in that particularly should the president of our association get too carried away or too big for his or her britches, you had perfected the art of the roast, at the AHLA annual meeting, and settled all scores as I recall.

Peter: It was great because only at the end of their tenures that they really had very little chance to respond, which I always appreciated.

Tom: What could they do, fire you? They were out the door already ...

Peter: Exactly! (laughs)

Tom: (laughs) Terrific, terrific. Peter, any thoughts about your biggest achievements at AHLA?

Peter: You know, I hoped that my biggest achievement was the meta goal at the very beginning, which was to create the culture that we talked about ... not create it, maintain it and build upon it. And

so I hoped that that 15 years will be remembered as kind of establishing a culture from the predecessor organization that was one of congeniality, sharing, and moving forward in common. So I hoped that that was how that period would be remembered.