



Embracing

An IPI Conference first-timer shares her experience in Orlando and how it changed her perspective on parking.

No one chooses parking; you kind of just fall into it. It's the common storyline I came across while networking at the 2018 IPI Conference & Expo, and I relate. See, I was a recent college graduate, who had worked customer service for transportation at the University of California, Riverside throughout my college career. I'm not an industry leader or even qualified to apply for CAPP, so how did I end up at the industry's largest conference? I kind of just fell into it. Our department wanted to pursue Accredited Parking Organization certification, but like most organizations interested in this endeavor, managers knew that it can be a challenge to work into staff time.

That's where I came into the picture. I was in limbo—a recent graduate who still didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up. Needless to say, I needed the transportation department as much as they needed me. So, we worked and worked and worked some more. And after five months of researching, compiling, organizing, and writing we received an email saying our application was approved and we would be awarded accreditation at the 2018 IPI Conference.

My work was done, sort of. When I came into the job I was under the impression I would be the elf making Christmas happen and the Santa of the show would be the organization. However, that wasn't the case. My team sent a slew of emails to find a way for me to tag along to the Conference. They surprised me with the good news two weeks before the event and I was elated.

Showing Up

As I arrived at the airport on Saturday morning I nearly turned back around to go home. My nerves crept up on

me and held on tight. What if my inexperience left me out of place among so many industry professionals? As I read the opportunities ahead of me—Shoptalks, facility tours, after-hour mixers—I knew there would be many opportunities to network and it was terrifying. Now, I am not usually a wuss, but fear of failure is my weakness. I helped achieve something great, but what happens when I don't achieve the expectations others have of me? The ticket was already paid for. The hotel room was booked. I had to go, so I got on the plane.

Right after landing in Orlando my anxiety about carrying on conversations with much more experienced professionals came true: I found myself talking to another event attendee with more than 20 years of experience. Luckily for me, she was an extrovert who offered me the warmest welcome. It helped build my confidence for the week ahead. My inexperience was a door for professionals to offer their advice and extend their hand as a resource to me. Instead of discussing the logistics of my organization's operations and the new directions we were taking to combat common industry threats, we were able to talk about how the experienced pros ended up in parking, why they never left, and what advice I should take if I decided to stay in the industry too.

With my newfound confidence, I was determined to make the most of this opportunity. Who knew when or if I'd ever get the chance to participate in something like this again? So I downloaded



My Inner

By Samantha Hamman

New-Bee



the app, built my agenda, and mostly stuck to it. I wasn't an industry expert and that was OK. I just had to take the opportunities that came up along the way. Nothing is worse than a door once it closes.

Jumping In

The opening general session introduced me to the level of investment and dedication people have for parking. When you only see one unit of an operation, you don't really know how far of a reach the industry has. It was eye-opening for me. I was only disappointed Oprah didn't show.

After the event, I saw IPI CEO Shawn Conrad, and, without thinking, I walked up to and said hello like I had known him for years. It's obvious I need to work on my tact, but I can't control adrenaline, only the hypothalamus can do that. Although we had a good laugh about it later, I remembered a valuable lesson. If you act without thinking, you have no time to let your nerves talk you out of something.

When we registered for the Conference, we had the chance to add ribbons to our name tags. There were ribbons for CAPP, APO, Speakers, New Members, and in the thick of it, little bee patches. I had no idea what they meant, but they were cute, so I took one and added it to my lanyard. It wasn't until the newcomers breakfast that I found out they were a punny welcome. We were new-bees—get it? An event with 3,500 participants can be intimidating, and the newcomers event showed us we weren't alone. We were a hive that had yet to earn stripes.

As probably the least experienced attendee, my favorite events were the education sessions. From being proud of what you produce, to rebranding remote lots, to autonomous vehicles, there was a topic for everyone. The speakers were people who were passionate about what they do and really wanted to share their experiences with others. They asked questions, were open to new answers, and found something that worked for them. If we are afraid to mix things up, to try and fail a few times, to change, then we will never progress.

Shoptalks

One of the most interesting sessions was the university shoptalk. Coming from a university environment, it was eye-opening to

see others running into the same issues we do. It was also amazing to hear about how far technology is pushing our industry. Our customers rarely see our investment in quality of life and general safety programs, but this session showed how much we care for them. They may want to tailgate on top of a parking structure for the view, but it's our job to stand up. We are the ones with the knowledge, and the shoptalk facilitates information sharing from first-hand accounts. It helped circulate business best practices, and that's something I can get behind.

Facility Tours

Because my attendance was just shy of a miracle, I didn't have the opportunity to sign up for some of the facility tours. A few of them were all booked, but I showed up anyway. I had nothing to lose. I got in on the Disney World operations tour when a seat opened up, and wow. Questions flew across the presentation room. The answers were at their core the same: Disney operates with customer service as their top priority, even if that means their employees do more work than we see as necessary. It was a revelation. This line of thinking was applied to other operations and technologies—would our customers see more than the parking and citation costs? Could they see us as the ambassadors we strive to be?

Sponsored Events

While IPI's events were fun, other excitement happened after hours. The Conference was not just a place to learn about past experiences and future expectations, but also a place where we could connect and build relationships. It was an all-encompassing opportunity bundle. Business cards were passed, handshakes were made, and conversations outside of work popped up more frequently than not. These smiles and laughs were the true highlights of my week.

I have to think people fall in to parking and stay because of their connections. It's the support others in the industry provide. It's also an industry where people are constantly seeking improvement to make their product—parking a car—as painless as possible. That much was easily seen on the Expo floor, in the Shoptalks, and throughout the educational seminars. No matter what level of involvement you have in the industry, there is opportunity for you. You just have to take it.

I felt lucky at first and then completely nerve-wracked, but opportunities are born out of hard work. Whether you decide to take them or turn around and go home is up to you, but one thing is for certain: You're never too old to learn something new, and you're never too young to know something of value. 📍



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