

A Christmas Wish

By Joseph P. Guzzo

The holidays are upon us, it's time to step back, reflect and think about all that has quickly passed during the year. Our personal lives are often overshadowed by our careers. I hope all have "survived" the highs and lows, and tried to keep work and personal life in the proper perspective. In my world of the plumbing code I have slipped, fallen, and been kicked off the mountain of credibility, but I continue to climb. And I have yet to run out of my endless supply of mistakes.

Our industry continues to make progress. Continuing education for Inspectors is a success, attendance for associations has never been better, new continuing education for all plumbers is on the horizon, and the restructuring of the apprentice program with major changes in classroom curriculum is near. Although some are slow all are signs of moving forward.

However with all of these new programs and ideas comes the obvious, disagreement. It is simply unavoidable. Call it human nature, many just don't like change. Others are frustrated and simply want to have their say in important matters that affect their careers. Unfortunately the outcome is open criticism, and in some cases pure disdain of the changes and the people that make them.

What to do? First we cannot stop, we must keep going, "stay the course" as Ron Regan used to say. But perhaps it might help to use a different approach. Major changes should not and cannot be shoved down our throat. There must be more than just public hearings. They must be brought to smaller groups for input. Polls or questionnaires must be sent by mail and e-mail. Small committees from each association should be created, study these changes and get opinions from the membership. And directly relay the results to the Board.

Code interpretations must be handled differently. It seems many are just too open ended, vague opinions not clearly thought out. When you hear a person making an interpretation and just by the sound of their voice you can tell they are not even sure, that's a problem. I get calls from plumbers constantly. The main complaint is that Inspectors have many varying code enforcement policies. It's like we are going back to when we had City codes. We must try to get uniformity back, after all we do have a uniform code.

Next the front office and the Board must listen more, and take advice more seriously. Be more user-friendly. I have heard many complaints of how plumbers and inspectors are spoken to when they call for advice. Dictating with arrogance seems to be the usual response. This behavior was on full display at a recent continuing education meeting in Woburn. As one of the Administrators, openly berated a group of Inspectors yelling, swearing, and ordering them to do what he said, it was shameful. Today there is way too much negativity floating around. Many prominent and experienced members of our profession don't even talk to each other, due to disagreements. It's saddens me to see this, especially when we are at meetings and functions and should be sharing ideas, and creating solutions.

A story to think about: When I was a youngster I, like many, would watch cartoons on Saturday morning. One cartoon was about a sheep dog and a wolf. At the start of each episode they would walk to work together as friends, sharing small talk

about the wife and kids etc. Then they would punch in for work. At that very moment they became mortal enemies, and proceeded to try to kill each other in every imaginable way - each trying to do their job, the wolf to hunt and the sheep dog to protect the herd. Then after a long day of beating the hell out of each other, the work bell would ring, they would punch out and head home still friends “see you in the morning,” “have a good night.” Now in the real world, you can watch this every day in many professions. Politics for example. They badger each other over issues then go play golf together. And in sports athletes play to win at any cost, but when the game is over many are close friends. However we do not live in a perfect world, something I keep telling myself. And this sportsmanship is just not possible for all people, that’s life.

So my Christmas wish is this, for everyone to at least keep the story of the wolf and the sheep dog in the back of your mind. Disagreements happen, they are a fact of life. Try not to let them consume you, especially after you have punched out of work.

A special thanks to all my supporters who inspire me to keep writing, via many e-mails, letters and phone calls. Happy holidays to all my brother inspectors, all the hard working plumbers, the supply houses that keep work moving, the Board and the Administration, all association members, and especially my friends, family and the lovely R.A.

Now if I can only conquer my own hypocrisy, maybe I’ll have a happy New Year.