



Transforming professional performance through the power of human interaction

ASPE 2015: Reflections of My First Conference

By Jenna Jackson

I thought my days of doing *The Hokey Pokey* were long gone. Yet, much to my delight, I found myself revisiting this familiar pastime at the 2015 ASPE Conference. I dove, head-first, into pre-conference immersion courses. Though the days were long, no one seemed to be in a hurry. It was a refreshing station where we were encouraged to engage in discussion with methodology masters. Exercises in SWOT analysis, review of procedure manual outlines, and case/checklist construction refueled my inner administrator. I understood the reason I jumped in; I was thirsty.

As the conference grew to over 340 people, I took my “whole self out.” Suddenly, I found myself looking through the crowds for people who looked like me—African-American. I did this for two reasons: 1) the comfort familiarity brings and 2) residual reservations from my years as the only African-American SP, or one of three, in an entire program.

All my apprehensions were allayed when we gathered for orientation. Mary Aiello led an activity called, “Concentric Circles,” where she asked us to form an inner and outer circle on each side of the room. We each faced a stranger and exchanged answers to questions displayed on the screen. At her command, we rotated to meet a new set of questions and a bright new face. There seemed to only be a two-second interval between rotations, so I had no other choice than to “put my whole self in and shake it all about.”

Now there was no turning back — my heart was invested. I was intellectually stimulated as each plenary speaker challenged me to see an expanded realm of possibility. My conference app became my co-pilot navigating me through 15 minute snapshot sessions; poster crawls, SIG group events; and a workshop/discussion on Diversity and Culture in the world of SPs.

By the end of the conference, I realized I *did* find people who looked like me; I found people from different backgrounds, occupations, nationalities, and ethnicities all dedicated to training professional performance through the power of human interaction. And, that’s what it’s all about.