

How Important is Lighting? (A treatment for Lighting Obsessive Disorder)

As an L D & A reader you know people who are passionate about lighting. You recognize the symptomatic behavior of those with lighting obsessive disorder. Conversations weave through other topics but lighting references are the common thread. Lighting subjects get them a bit more worked up and even if the froth on their mouth is not visible you can tell when people are caught up in something that captivates them.

Is that passion warranted? How important is lighting? If you want to feel and understand the value you bring, the contribution you make, by being a worker in the lighting industry, my recommendation is to witness one of David DiLaura's presentations on the History of Lighting. He has captured through his chronology and perspective a sense of meaning for those of us that spend so much of our time immersed in this field. He recounts a celebration of light in 1929 called Lights Golden Jubilee. This came at a time when people appreciated and were discovering clean, bright, affordable and instant illumination. Consider the alternative, flame sources stink, are dangerous, dim and dirty. The safety, security and productivity that we provide improves the quality of lives even if most take it for granted today.

We all want to feel that what we are doing is valuable and there is ample reason to be proud of our industry. What I have been considering lately however is importance from a different perspective. How important is lighting expertise compared to our other skills? We may be very efficient at our jobs but how effective are we? Just as with lighting, our products may be very efficient and yet ineffective when they are not applied correctly. LED exterior area fixtures for example are generally less efficient than metal halide but can be more effective in that application. What can we do to enhance our effectiveness when applying our lighting skills?

Financial success, according to Dale Carnegie is due 15 percent to professional knowledge and 85 percent to "the ability to express ideas, to assume leadership, and to arouse enthusiasm among people." We may be impressively smart lighting geeks but if we cannot communicate what we know it has little value. The Dale Carnegie book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People" has sold over 15 million copies because it works to help us communicate what we know. Consider two not so fictional characters whose names I have changed to protect the guilty. One is a poser who always looks sharp, talks a good game, but has no substance or depth to his knowledge. The way we present ourselves, our appearance, how articulate we are and our personalities can elevate us to significant careers but those close to posers do not respect the hypocrisy between their words and their knowledge. You may have attended presentations where the speaker was clearly using someone else's PowerPoint and did not understand the slides enough to answer questions. We lose respect quickly when someone presents him or herself as smarter than a 5th grader and proves otherwise.

Conversely, I have endured seemingly endless presentations from individuals much more knowledgeable than myself that could not structure, focus or articulate their information let alone command an audience. A stereotype for engineers is best expressed by the joke, "What do engineers use for birth control?" with the answer being "their personalities". A personable engineer told this to me but it refers to an impression that some deeply skilled professionals deserve. I recall a brand manager that was often requested by agents to give presentations to their customers because of this person's position and knowledge. The presentations were brutal and the evaluations consistently poor. The agents had found the guy who knew the most but his inability to communicate negated his value to his audience.

Who would you hire first, the poser or the person with bad communication skills? The poser would shine in the interview by comparison. Companies would prefer employees who possess ideal looks, communication skills, business competence and technical proficiency for their job. Over time individual deficiencies will be revealed and will hinder the individual and company due to unrealized potential.

Because of these peripheral skills being critical to achieving excellence in the lighting industry the Lighting Solutions Center partnered with the local Dale Carnegie Training Team to teach communication tools to our course attendees and employees. The evaluations of the classes often refer to a life changing impact that attendees want their spouse, coworkers or everyone to experience.

Once you enhance your communication skills then all of your knowledge, including lighting becomes more evident. Relationships should improve both at work and home. I would argue that communication skills trump lighting skills in this regard. The refining is not finished yet however. What about your business skills? You may be a great communicator and understand the entire IES Handbook but if you do not have the ability to prioritize, to handle conflict resolution, to be proactive, synergetic and to negotiate win-win solutions your business will suffer. Business skills are a critical component to effectiveness in the workplace.

It was a conscious decision to address these needs at our facility so our instructors became certified to teach Stephen Covey's "7 Habits of Effective People" in 3 day sessions. The book that our course is based on is also one of the best selling books of all time equaling the 15 million sold by Dale Carnegie. Both Covey and Carnegie have published many books but our focus is on their seminal works. The 7 Habits builds on the people skills taught by Carnegie's team and adds a contemporary business aspect to their application. New tools are provided for how to manage time and to think creatively for new solutions rather than accept scenarios where one wins at another's expense. I have been teaching in lighting education facilities for over a decade and there only two classes that I have heard referred to as life changing. The Carnegie and Covey sessions are capable of changing your life by

improving how you relate to people, how you conduct business and how you perceive life every day.

By themselves these skills will not make you successful but not possessing these skills will hold you back. For those having Lighting Obsessive Disorder the understanding that lighting knowledge is at best equal to and likely subordinate to communication and business skills in terms of importance can be the start of their treatment and recovery. If you are passionate about lighting and want to be effective communicating your passion and successful in your lighting career then seek the balance noted in this article. Carnegie and Covey have many locations and live training options. The interaction in a class is ideal but if budget constraints limit your options consider the printed and audio books available through any bookseller. See also www.dalecarnegie.com and www.stephencovey.com.