

CRM Day 2011

Today I made a difference. I decided to write down my thoughts while travelling home from Washington so that they were fresh in my mind. While it is my goal to make a difference when I cross the threshold at work every day, it is often difficult to achieve this goal on a daily basis. Visiting Capitol Hill helps to place all of the minutia that we face in a typical office setting in perspective.

ACRA CRM day takes a lot of planning. First, the ACRA VP has the unenviable task of convincing members, many of whom are having a tough year, yet again, that they need to come to the event and meet with their legislators. Second, each person has to register for the event. Third, we have to PAY for our tickets and hotel rooms. Fourth, we have to give up at least one day, closer to two or even three when you include travel time, of billable time that our firms cannot recoup. Finally, we have to meet with people that we don't know, have few connections with, and who might not be sympathetic to our cause. This year, we arrived on the day that Congress passed the much-disputed appropriations bill. It seemed an inauspicious day to ask for money or anything else.

These problems aside, from my perspective, the 2011 message from ACRA to our legislators of "Historic Preservation means Jobs," was well received. This message was delivered by about a dozen ACRA members from across the country. Our group met on Tuesday night, we were briefed by our consultants, we had the opportunity to roll play a meeting or, watch a fellow ACRA member struggle through the roll play (Thanks, Jeanne!), we were provided with detailed schedules for our meetings, and we were asked to show up on time and deliver our message as clearly as possible. We all had the chance to review our themes and practice a little that night.

Until this spring, I did not understand why attending CRM day was important. Each of us is a single vote, we are small fish in a very large pond. Could we really make a difference? In addition, there are many ACRA firms, surely someone else could cover this responsibility for me. As I went through the process, I realized how important I was. As Woody Allen says, "Ninety percent of life is just showing up;" nowhere is this more evident than Washington D.C. Meeting with legislators is all about making personal connections. While ACRA is a National organization, our Congress is composed of people who represent individual constituencies. The first question one addresses in each meeting is where do you live and work and how many, in my case Ohioans, do I employ. My Senators and Representatives think it is nice that I have employees in other states, but they really like the fact that Gray & Pape, Inc. is an OHIO company. They are from OHIO. They represent OHIO. They are interested in people from OHIO. I am sure my point is made. It was FANTASTIC that three of us from OHIO were present when meeting with our Senators aids. We could talk easily about the importance of our industry to the whole state. The message that Historic Preservation provides hundreds of jobs in the state of OHIO was VERY well received. But I can't speak for any other state except Ohio. We do have offices in other states, and while I can visit those senators and representatives, and they will probably take a meeting, it is much more effective for one of their constituents to visit.

By showing up last week, I had a face to face meeting with the representative for my district. It is somewhat unusual to get a meeting with your representative, and I was a little nervous. My

representative, Jean Schmidt, is a fiscal and social conservative, and everyone just got their budgets trimmed. I arrived at her office and was immediately engaged. She was very excited to hear about the people that we employ in her district and the projects that we have helped to complete in her district. We spoke for precisely 8 minutes. As I was packing up to leave, I asked her to sign my running shirt (my representative is an avid marathoner and I knew she was running in the same marathon that I'm training for). She was thrilled to sign, wished me luck and then spoke with me for another 10 minutes and running. As I left she said, "Cinder, it was good to meet you, good luck in the marathon, thanks for bringing me your message about the importance of historic preservation in my district. I will have you in mind in FY 2012." She remembered my name, she made a personal connection, and most important, she remembered my message! I left to hop on a plane, knowing that this simple 18 minute meeting really could make a difference next year. It was a good feeling and one I hope many of you will help me replicate next year.