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Thirty Years and Going Strong

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Congratulations, Eta Sigma Gamma! Thirty Years and Going Strong

Beverly Mahoney, PhD, CHES

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As your incoming president, I was asked to write a "reflections" article for this Anniversary Issue of *The Health Educator*. What a wonderful opportunity, and, at the same time, what a heavy responsibility. Anniversary issues tend to be the ones people save, the ones we return to in years ahead, so attempting to write to you about the new century and Eta Sigma Gamma is a bit overwhelming and very humbling.

I thought I might best talk about the future if I first reviewed the past. To that end, I curled up with a cup of tea and read Dr. Brenda Smith's excellent "*Eta Sigma Gamma: The Early Years: 1967-1982*." (*The Eta Sigma Gamma Monograph Series*, February, 1989). It was delightful journey through those first fifteen years. We've doubled the time of our organizational lifespan since then, and I'm sure that there have been more than ample activities to warrant another such monograph. As I read through the accounts of our heritage, the purposes, rituals, documents, and people who were the genesis of this organization, I felt honored to be a member of Eta Sigma Gamma. I also realized that Eta Sigma Gamma shares one prevailing characteristic with most other human organizations: we have one constant, and that constant is change.

Change can be productive, or destructive, depending upon a myriad of factors. My goals, and I expect the goals of most members for our organization, include change. Not necessarily change for the sake of change alone, but to better us, to allow us to serve our members, our universities, and our communities well into the 21st century. Everywhere we look today, we see people planning incredible celebrations for the coming century. Organizations, both private and governmental, have noble goals for the year 2000. People are planning larger-than-life ways to greet the new millennium. Giant changes can be most productive—those wonderful, momentous occasions when we launch out into the unknown—but I suspect that the smaller pieces of change,

the day-by-day, inch-by-inch, processes are what actually drive us. What do you see in the future for Eta Sigma Gamma? I would not be so pretentious as to impose my, or any one person's vision on all. We are currently forming a strategic planning committee, whose members will work to establish goals based on our collective vision. I don't yet know what all of those goals will encompass, and cannot yet articulate them for you. Instead of attempting to describe a future I do not yet clearly see, let me share with you, in acrostic form, some guiding words and phrases I think will be helpful for Eta Sigma Gamma.

“. . . change . . . to better us, to allow us to serve our members, our universities and our communities well into the 21st century.”

B. Mahoney

C H A N G E

C is for conviction. Webster defined conviction as a strong persuasion or belief. You are members of an honorary dedicated to teaching, service, and research. As such, you have already committed yourselves to the conviction that these three activities, accompanied by personal and scholarly growth, are worthy of your time and energy. You have proclaimed, by ritual, when you were initiated into this honorary, that you would uphold these principles. Convict yourself,

as members of Eta Sigma Gamma, to the premise that these three principles guide your individual and your professional lives.

H is, of course, for Health.

We are who and what we are because of a common dedication to health. We all are familiar with the World Health Organization's now classic 1947 definition of health as "The state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." We all also know that things about that definition that have changed over the years. I like to use Dr. Richard Eberst's cube model, to include dimensions of emotional, intellectual, spiritual, physical, social, and vocational health. I love children's old-fashioned toys, particularly the simple ones. Clay, bubbles, wooden blocks, and even though it is a bit newer, I love the Rubik's Cube. I take it into my classes, and we talk about health from this standpoint. What is my biggest concern? Not that students recite the dimensions,

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although they are important, but that they understand how completely interrelated the dimensions of health are. When I move even one block to change the colors on one side of the cube, at least one other side, one other dimension of health, is affected. Our spiritual health is not isolated from our intellectual, or physical, health. We are not isolated from others in our dynamic communities, whether they be circumscribed and defined by political or geographical, or even professional boundaries. We are connected to the greater whole, the system. Health is the focus, the reason we're here. I ask you to remember these dynamic interrelationships as you move forward in your profession.

A is for attention: yours and mine.

Attention to detail. It takes all kinds of people to accomplish our goals. Some are dreamers—they see the big picture. They envision the future. We need them desperately. Others are doers. They maintain the attention to detail that is so necessary to carrying out our plans. Without them, all the dreams in the world will fall flat. We need them every bit as much as those who first see the future. We all need to work toward that attention side. What is it we need to do? Not too many years ago the movie "What About Bob?" featured a particularly neurotic Bob (played by Bill Murray) trying to convince psychologist Richard Dreyfuss that he could help Bob return to emotional health. At one point in the film, Bob is encouraged to take "baby steps." It is my contention that attention to our community and personal needs is paramount as we move into the next phase of our growth. To that end, we can work together, giving attention to both the greater vision and the smaller baby steps we'll need to take to achieve our goals. When the strategic plan is finished, it will be merely that—a plan. The attention to detail and the dedication of those who will carry it out are the real mark of growth and change.

N is for navigation.

We need sound navigators to see us through our next 30 years. Navigators have used an incredible variety of tools over the centuries, including sextants, compasses, the stars, maps, and highly sophisticated systems to help them guide others in their travels. As we travel throughout our course of development as an organization, we also need to accurately navigate the course, using both well-established tools and technologically innovative instruments. Establishing markers along the way is often helpful for navigators, and as we move forward I imagine that our progress will be helped by both the short and long range markers, by the basics and by technology. We will need multiple navigators, examining our goals from differing perspectives, moving toward them from different locations, to take us where we want to be.

G is for group.

You may have thought that G would represent growth, but we'll get to that shortly. Group is important because Eta Sigma Gamma is not any one person. Yes, we had individual founders without whose vision we would not exist at all, and, yes, we have had individual members who have contributed so much to our development, but in the end we are a group of people dedicated to our set of ideals and principles. Select any problem or challenge you wish, and put it in front of one person, even one brilliant person. You will receive some solutions, or some alternatives as to how the problem might be overcome, how the goal might be reached. Select the same problem, however, and put it in front of a group. The alternative solutions will multiply. We have a unique opportunity, as members of this group, Eta Sigma Gamma, to give of our time, energy, and expertise to make a difference in the lives of others...clearly not an opportunity to be taken lightly. It's all possible because we have a group identity. Treasure it.

E is for excellence.

Here's where we get to the growth you were expecting before. In his classic, *Further Up the Organization*, mega-manager Robert Townsend (1984) said "growth is the by-product of the pursuit of excellence and not itself a worthy goal." I agree. If all we look to do is grow, we may be sadly disappointed at some point in the future. Growth only for the sake of growth has the potential to be less than fulfilling. Ask any parent of a teenager whose party invitation list grew. Pursuing, and achieving, excellence, however, are other matters entirely. If we continue to hold our ideals high, to contribute to the overall excellence of our profession, to augment our careers with contributions to the communities in which we live, and to work, always, toward excellence, we will grow because of that excellence. It's that simple.

So there you have it. Conviction, health, attention, navigation, group identity, and excellence. Six little concepts, any of which, by themselves, can convey a particular variety of meanings. Together they represent a positive pathway of change for us all, as members of an honorary with a 30 year tradition of excellence. I congratulate you on being a member of this ever-changing organization, on maintaining your standards of excellence, and on looking to the future of Eta Sigma Gamma and how you can serve the organization in the decades to come. Wear your pin proudly, and make a difference in the lives of others. The new century will come, one day at a time. Let's move toward it together.

References

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