

Even Practitioners Need A Sense Of Belonging

John Caccavale, Ph.D., M.S.

Having a sense of belonging is important to people. Belonging to something provides grounding and a sense of camaraderie. There are several hundred thousand psychologists in the United States. Yet, only about a third belong to any organized psychology group. Why is this when psychologists, more so than most people, understand the importance of belonging? I think that a strong case can be made that psychologists have become increasingly alienated and hopeless about our chosen profession. Many have slipped into the routine of our practices choosing to forego any professional association. Some of our colleagues harbor a sense of anger and perhaps betrayal that we have not advanced as much as we had thought when we first started out. Others still suffer from the ordeal of graduate school, finishing pre and postdoc internships and finally becoming licensed. Some of our colleagues have been treated so badly in their graduate programs that, once licensed, they keep to themselves as much as possible. Then there are those colleagues who feel that psychology organizations hold little or no added value to their professional lives. Different people have different needs.

These are many of the reasons that practitioners have emailed me as to why they have not joined a state association or APA. However, whatever the reasons, it is difficult to be on the outside without any real support and to forego the experience of being part of something. This is not the case with those psychologists in academia. They understand the meaning and importance of belonging. I think we can learn something from them. They belong to many psychology groups and they control the agenda. Academic psychologists volunteer more and make the most of the infantile politics inherent to academia and many psychology organizations. Of course, they have the time and the universities subsidize their memberships. If you are an APA member and belong to various academic groups, APA will even give you a 25% discount on your dues. Practitioners have some good reasons to be dismayed particularly when practitioner dues are charged an additional "assessment" in excess of what academic members are charged.

As the landscape has changed dramatically over the past few years, practice is under attack from many sectors--some because they have been successful in expanding their scope of practice--others because they offer their services more cheaply. While the doctorate is the entry level into professional psychology, many of the same institutions that use practitioners to keep their faculties employed and programs afloat, have betrayed us by dumping as many master level practitioners onto the market as they could train. Thus, its easy to see why some colleagues have become alienated and distrust joining an organization.

I would ask these colleagues to rethink their reasons for remaining on the outside. Failure to stand up for your practice is the same as giving it away. Only with numbers can we have influence and power. Let us not be naive about this: Allow the negative feelings and thoughts from past experiences to keep you on the sidelines then those forces who

desire to see professional psychology fail simply will prevail. Allowing a small percentage of our colleagues to carry the weight is not a viable strategy.

If NAPPP is to succeed we need members who are committed to change. Its that simple. There is no other organization on the horizon. We do it now or let the dynamics against practice prevail. I have a metaphor that I like telling my patients: *"It is not really effective to act like a leaf meandering down a stream being carried place to place by the current without any resistance against the flow."* I think that this applies here.

If you are not a NAPPP member we invite you to seriously think about joining. If you happen to belong to a small group of psychologists consider affiliating with NAPPP. We are in various stages of completing affiliation agreements with several groups. Groups that affiliate with NAPPP keep their individuality and independence but become part of the larger picture. Its called organizational synergy. As NAPPP grows, smallness becomes largeness and with all the concurrent opportunities that large numbers imply.

Some may pose the question: What guarantee is there that NAPPP will not become like those other organizations who are large but do so little? NAPPP, like any organization, can become bloated, lazy, inefficient, and ineffective. This could happen if we place our organization in the hands of bureaucrats who come to believe that the organization is their property. This can happen if members become alienated and uninvolved. This can happen if we buy real estate property instead of using dues money for the membership. **NAPPP will never own real estate. NAPPP will never give our organization over to bureaucrats.** While other organizations will just ask you to renew your dues with a notice, NAPPP will give you a report card stating what we objectively achieved and where we didn't. The vote that will count is your renewal. Real democracy without the petty politics of ceremonial offices.

In conclusion, it's a risk that each practitioner will have to assess. Is one year dues worth taking a risk for the potential to advance practice and to decide our own destiny as practitioners? Each individual will have to answer this question. Many of us already have and that's why we are working without compensation and, for many of us, we feel exhilarated, motivated, excited, hopeful, and have a sense of belonging. To us, this is far more valuable than a year's worth of dues.