

The President's Message

If Not Now, When?

It's time to start getting serious about collaboration



*Brad Pierce
President
Restaurant Equipment World
brad.pierce@reworld.com*

This year's National Restaurant Association Show was a hit. The show floor was buzzing with activity and there was a level of excitement in the air, thanks to expectations of prosperity returning to our industry. The most remarkable event at the show, however, didn't take place in the booths or crowded aisles. It occurred in the depths of the basement at McCormick Place. On Sunday, May 18, 2014, the industry association leadership came together in a scene that was reminiscent of the meeting of the five families in the Godfather.

I've remarked in the past how it often feels like our industry operates in silos. CFESA, FCSI, FEDA, MAFSI and NAFEM each do an outstanding job representing the interests of their membership—yet each work independently from one another with their own agendas. Many of these agendas overlap, yet we've been so engrained in keeping the status quo that we've been blind to this reality. The time has come to remove the blinders and embrace the future by sitting down together for the purpose of engaging in a dialogue.

We spent nearly two hours sharing insights and challenges faced by each of our respected segments of the industry. This provided a platform for identification of common ground items, such as the need to recruit new young talent into our industry. We discussed strategy items including inviting input from young professionals who've already taken the leap and joined our companies. We also discussed the need for improved education to properly train future and current industry associates. What began as a loosely knit discussion soon erupted into a firestorm of meaningful thoughts and ideas. Everyone's voice was heard, everyone's contribution was valued. We were working together, we were developing a plan, and we were committing

to each do our part to make it a success.

With a small victory in hand, the dialogue moved on to a broader topic—how do we convey the message of collaboration to our association members? We needed to make it clear to all that it was a new day and dignity was being restored to the term “industry partners.” As a start, each association leader committed to sharing news and accomplishments of fellow associations with their membership. We also agreed that in order for our members to respect one another's contributions to the channel, we need to encourage our members to interact with other industry association members. In keeping with the spirit of this initiative, I'm asking for you each to make a conscious effort to reach out to your reps, consultants, manufacturers and service agents. Instead of the usual call to gripe about a problem or inquire about an additional discount, ask them to meet for the sole purpose of discussing your mutual success as a partner. It will be a refreshing change and will yield positive results for both of your organizations.

It's time to break down the silos, leverage our strengths, and work together for the common good. I'm confident my association counterparts are fully committed to doing their part to make this initiative successful. We won't always agree on everything and we have many challenges to overcome, but in the famous words of Winston Churchill, “If not us, who? If not now, when?” The time is now, it's time to move beyond the status quo and start collaborating to make our industry thrive, TOGETHER. □

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brad Pierce". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.