

Notes: Leadership Series #2 – Connection to Purpose: Getting Emerging Leaders Plugged In

June 30, 2022

2:00 PM

Participants: 48

This event has been recorded and is posted with notes and presentations at

<https://www.wef.org/membership/wef-member-associations/>

Subjects Covered

WEF President-Elect Ifetayo Venner will provide the opening and closing message. Casey Gish will share the work of the WEF House of Delegates in framing the hurdles people experience within their MA and WEF. Learn ways to get members plugged into leadership roles. Hear the water journey from the perspective of a student, a member who entered later into the industry and from an engaged young professional.

BREAKOUT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You will be randomly put into breakout rooms. Please ask one person to be the note taker who will share the notes. The note taker will be asked to share key point in the Chat once we all get back into the main room or they can email dcrilley@wef.org with the full notes. Notes will be shared with all in the final wrap-up message sent with the recording. The discussion questions are stated below.

- a. What practices have worked well for your growth into leadership?
- b. What's one thing WEF can change to empower emerging leaders?

SPEAKER AND PRESENTER BIO'S

Ifetayo Venner, P.E. is a professional engineer and Envision Sustainable with Arcadis. She is a licensed professional engineer in Florida and Texas. She is currently the WEF President-Elect serving on the 2021-2022 WEF Board of Trustees.

Casey Gish is an environmental engineer in the Brown and Caldwell Seattle office and serves as a WEF Delegate for the Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association.

Zachary Loeb graduated from UCF's Environmental Engineering Program with two degrees B.S Environmental Engineering, B.A. Anthropology in 2020. He has worked as an Engineer in Training at Clay County Utility Authority since January 2021, working towards his P.E licensure. He has served as a judge for the Stockholm Junior Water Prize (SJWP) for the Florida Water Environment Association for 6 years and counting. He now serves as the SJWP Florida State Lead on the FWEA Public Communications and Outreach Committee and holds the Membership Coordinator position for the FSAWWA Region II/ FWEA First Coast Joint Steering Committee.

Dylan Christenson, PE is a Process Engineer at Black & Veatch in Houston, TX. Dylan is a Wastewater Process Engineer for Black & Veatch, based in Houston, TX. In his role within the water technology group Dylan works with established and innovative technologies in designing treatment solutions for municipal and industrial clients. He is enthusiastic about sustainability and innovation in nutrient, energy, and water recovery. Dylan is also involved in efforts to build the workforce of the future through outreach and education initiatives within Texas and at the national level specifically focused on water and wastewater plant operators. Given a bit of free time, Dylan loves to be outdoors with his wife and three boys, reading a good book, or creating an "edible mess" in the kitchen.

Vanessa Borkowski is a Senior Civil Engineer in Hartford, CT where she is responsible for technical development of design deliverables for treatment plant and collection system infrastructure. Vanessa is a registered professional engineer in Connecticut and Arizona with 11 years of experience. She completed her bachelor's and master's Degrees in Environmental Engineering at Arizona State University. Vanessa is a former Chair of WEF's Students and Young Professionals Committee. She is a Community of Practice Director for Outreach and Innovation, and the Vice Chair of the Plant Operations and Maintenance Committee's Operator's Essentials Column for WEF.

Housekeeping reminders & Introduction

Dianne Crilley

Welcome Message

Ifetayo Venner, WEF President-Elect (Opening Message)

Welcome everybody to our first session in this series. This issue is dear to my heart and critical to WEF and MA's in getting emerging leaders plugged into WEF. I started in SYP committee and there for a few years and worked my way up the chain in the committee. Then I moved to FL where my role became more national. Folks encouraged me to try out for Chair of sustainability committee, but people really encouraged me to do so. I then became a director and then on the Board for the past 5/6 years.

I strongly believe I would not be at my career with Arcadis if it were not for my experience at WEF. The leaders have passion for the organization and passion for what we do and feel strongly about giving back to the emerging leaders and we have some best practice items to share. We want to continue that pipeline of engagement to leadership. Casey will speak to the professional leader's workgroup in the House.

Background and Identifying Hurdles

Casey Gish, WEF Delegate (PNCWA)

I am an engineer by day in the Brown & Caldwell office in Seattle and my night I'm the committee chair of the professional's leader's workgroup in the House of Delegates. This is a discussion so feel free to engage or speak up and ask questions. Dianne will monitor the chat. High-level overview? What is the HOD? It's the Rep. body of WEF. Each MA has 1-3 delegates who form the HOD. The HOD speaker has developed the emerging leadership workgroup to overcome hurdles they experience. All MAs rely on leaders to join committees and other leadership opportunities.

- Identified barriers, Creating Pathways and Develop Resources
- Outcomes: Create examples of roadmaps to leadership in MAs and WEF
- Identify roles, opportunities, and growth paths
- Recommendations for continuation of work

Seven Hurdles to Engagement

- Lack of awareness opportunities
- Lack of apparent support
- Lack of clear objectives
- Lack of perceived values
- Lack of resources
- Costs of participation in WEF activities (Tied with 3rd Largest Hurdle)
- The need for existing leadership to embrace emerging professionals as leaders in the WEF community

WEF Member Surveys

- EPL Workgroup
- Emerging Leaders' Summit at WEF Utility
- WEF Student & Young Professionals Committee
- House of Delegates
- WEFMAX Charleston

Hurdles to Engagement

Definition of Hurdle

- Lack of easy and available information
- Lack of clarity when communicating

Potential Solutions

- Targeted Messaging
- Micro-volunteering
- Identify champions to communicate opportunities
- Info sessions/webinars

Lack of apparent support to invitation to join

Definition of Hurdle

- Employers do not understand value
- Bias-age/skills/etc.
- Intimidation and fear

Potential Solutions

- Mentor program
- Defined purpose
- Clearly defined ROI
- Inclusive environment
- Clear path for EL growth

WEF & MA Leadership Development

WEF – Water Leadership Institute

MA Leadership Development

- WEA of South Carolina – Leadership Academy
- KY/TN Water Professionals – Leadership Academy

Bear in mind that you can “google” WEFMAX and read about WEF & MA Leadership Development at wef.org

Poll: Does your MA have a Leadership Institute/Academy?

Yes: 25%

No: 72%

Under Consideration: 3%

In the Implementation Phase: 0

Chat: Ken Vogt, “North Carolina has an Academy dealing with leadership soft skills.”

Sharing Emerging Leader Stories – How they became engaged?

Zach Loeb (Student’s perspective – His WEF Journey)

“First involved with WEF and FLWEA in HS through the science fair(s). I met many people who encouraged my research. I was empowered by people/WEF members who allowed me to do

experiments. Also, SJWP was extremely important to my growth. It is an amazing experience. Through SJWP, I was first place/runner up and it was amazing. I was a winner in FL and had an article in the FL WEA journal which helped me move forward. Also, I was able to go to DC and meet industry professionals. I was contacted by Fred Wright (head of SJWP at that time). Fred asked Zach to come back as a judge. I jumped at that opportunity. I have been a judge for SJWP for 7 years and assisting/helping the students. Now I'm head of the project in FL with double participation and improved the quality of the papers we have. The college student design contest was important to me, and I was the only winner as a team as one in FL and was able to go to WEFTEC (national level). Now in my everyday work life, I am collaborating with consultants who were judges who recognize me from the SDC and that I won. The networking is invaluable for me. Now I am also a judge for the SDC and judged in FL environmental category. I cannot speak enough about that. These opportunities elevated me and gave the chance to do it and now I can give back. Locally, I am the member coordinator for the First Coast chapter and so in my case as I advance in my career, there are always opportunities which allow me to be where I'm at today."

Dylan Christenson (Later in life perspective)

"I encourage the group or those of you connected within your MA or WEF, even if you feel you have a long way to grow, we encourage you to get involved. I am an older emerging leader, and I came into our industry with an older in years, but young at heart. I was involved as a student in Texas Tech and unaware of how WEF worked. I was blessed to have been involved in the springboard program. It is an amazing program which provided me a piece of my water family & friendly faces. I saw some of these folks at WEFTEC and created the confidence to feel comfortable in an otherwise intimidating space. Once you are connected at WEF, you will see we're connected and we're family. The challenge is when you are young, not knowing can be intimidating. We need to turn outward and invite people in. How can we plug others in even if we do not know the path forward? At WEFTEC or wherever, you can never go wrong by saying hi and connecting – the human side of connecting. The water family gets me up in the morning. But when we do "this" as a large group, we can make differences together. Also having frequent opportunities to bring people together is crucial. If you are a leader, then create activities to bring people together and if you are younger/new, take the initiative and become active."

- Importance of my water family – my WEF WEAT family is the most fun part of my job. It was providing me so many amazing opportunities and wonderful friendships. Working on the broader challenges and opportunities together as a water family is truly what gets me up in the morning.
- Raising your hand to join in is the key to connecting
- Power of smaller communities' experiences to link you into the broader group. Example the YP Springboard program for me.
- Challenge: One of the great things about WEF is we are often so connected to each other as people that we share a lot of inside jokes, vernacular, understanding of WEF structure etc. This can make entering in from the outside a bit intimidating to new members. In our connectedness to each other we must remember to reach out outward to keep bringing others in
- The power of a smile or a friendly face in a big room

Vanessa Borkowski (A Young Professional "YP" view)

"The benefits being connected with people is so important and a critical part of my story. My association with my MA and WEF was crucial to me and my growth. I started volunteering at the MA letter in my home state of AZ while completing my master's degree. Showing up is ½ the battle. I found a mentor who connected me with more people. I got involved with the YP summit and ended up saying yes to

this and that opportunity. There were opportunities to develop my skills and landed with the SYPC with WEF and served as a leader there and ran various programs and through this experience I was able to challenge my leadership skills and be an advocate for WEF. Also elevate YPs and helping them grow into other opportunities. I learned how to find my next step and there were people who could assist me, and I wanted to do more, crave something different. I did not have someone initially charter that next opportunity for me until I met WEF contacts who could help me out as well. We are also having the opportunity to move upward but need to pull others to come up as well with us; like a succession plan. I have five committees which report up to me and I am the leader who contacts the committee leadership and assists them with strategic planning and resolving issues. I also have the support of my employer as well which makes things easy. I am intentional about what I want and can further assist others. It has taken some time to get there but overall, we in the water community are building the strong foundation of our water leaders and happy to be a part of that.

Breakout

1. What Practices worked well for your growth into Leadership?
 - Having a mentor is crucial
 - Starting at the local level and volunteering
 - All starts with involvement and then ask to become a chair and it leads to a Board position
 - Need an experience person to grab you and encourage you

2. What one thing WEF can change to empower emerging leaders?
 - WEF is doing it, bridging the gap and that the SYPC group acts as a bridge group before entering more technical committees/groups within WEF
 - Get rid of the “old WEF mindset” being that “you’re young, and YPs don’t have the technical experience to do certain things” WEF is trying to get rid of that old mindset and encourage YP’s to become involved and value their experiences/point of view.
 - Glad the *Good ole Boy* network is changing
 - AWWA has a mentorship program and WEF may wish to implement that at the MA or national level.

Report Out/What did we learn?

Share in “chat” the highlights of your group discussions (Casey Gish)

Shelby Gilmartin - Emerging Leader Co-Chair

Jane Carlson - Past President Central States WEA

Vendansh Gupta - New member student and young professional WEF

Laura Oakes - Chesapeake WEA Past President

What practices have worked well for your growth into leadership?

Shelby Gilmartin (Emerging Leader Co-Chair)

- Ask someone to participate or to take on a bigger role – Chesapeake
- Annual conference, new committee is forming, get people involved; chair and vice chair roles, state and organization level, easier for vice chair and work up to chair - Central States
- Regular emails to help get involved
- Giving someone an ear before a seat at the table; sit and listen and gain perspective; asking someone to attend before participating

What is one thing WEF can change to empower emerging leaders?

- Focused emails on how to get involved in committees
- More outreach through social media, emails, and MA leaders
- Utilizing WEF Delegates that represent MAs

Zachary Loeb

” Engage in local and state science fairs, especially state level. Engage and empower passionate students and let them take on more leadership roles (even someone else might think its minor) as they advance.”

Layne McWilliams

“I liked Ken's suggestion: a "professional development roadmap" for WEF - give guidance and suggestions through some good questions.”

Ken Vogt

Room 5 – “Start professional development early - high school, vocational technical HS, STEM magnet schools (helps utility staffing), start in MAs, transition to WEF national issues. WEF professional development roadmap/FAQs - when might be the right/best time to become more heavily involved in WEF's programs, committees, leadership?”

Anndee Chester

“Getting involved first at the MA level. Join committees at the state or MA level. At the WEF level, also join committees. It helps to build your network to get plugged in. 2) Not necessarily a change but a suggestion, which getting involved will benefit your career and make you more knowledgeable. People will see you has resource and expert. Starting with committee involvement can help you advance to other opportunities.”

Douglas Pike

“Committees can be a great skill building opportunity. WEF can provide chair training to make sure committee members are learning and getting new skills while volunteering. This results in the ROI.”

Closing Statement

Ifetayo Venner

“I liked the stories we heard today and the concept of encouraging folks along their way; which is how I grew into my position today. How can we better create a more inclusive environment and create more opportunities for people to have a voice? How can we be more strategic, initiative-taking, and intentional? How do we sustain and train-up the leaders for them to stay and move forward? It is important to me. I appreciate everyone’s time. Thank you for all you do for WEF and water!