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ABOUT ASTD



A Tumultuous Transition: Jan Margolis, 1979 volunteer president

ASTD was not immune to the economic, political, social, and cultural turmoil that buffeted the United States in the 1970s. When asked to recall her tenure as ASTD volunteer president in 1979, Jan Margolis took pains to put the changes that ASTD underwent into the context of that period - perhaps a natural response from a woman who majored in history in college and whose first career title was high school history teacher.



Jan Margolis, 1979

ASTD Then...

When Jan Margolis became ASTD's first female volunteer president in 1979, the association was a different place: its headquarters was in Madison, Wisconsin; men dominated the leadership, if not the profession; there had never been a competency model; chapters were very active and visible; officer elections could be hotly contested; and the association confronted the wrenching experience of examining the identity of the profession, ASTD's place in the profession, and its place in the world.

Many movements were launched during Margolis's term: the move to Washington, DC; development of the first strategic plan, aimed at restructuring the organization for efficiency and positioning it to be the voice of the profession; and defining the profession with best practices and efforts to develop the first competency model.



Jan Margolis today

The Context

The former history teacher shared her views on the context of the times:

"I always find that organizations change and leadership styles and people change because of the circumstances going on around them and the challenges that the organization is facing. Thinking back to the 1970s it was a very strained period of time, coming out of the chaos of the 1960s.

"There was a lot of challenge to government, to governance, and to frameworks. People were beginning to rail against authority and not believing everything they were told. [My election as the first female president at age 35] could not have happened before 1979, given the social milieu. The fact that it happened caused a great deal of turmoil within the organization. It was profoundly difficult. It would not have happened were it not for the civil rights events of the 60s and the structural transformations that were going on in society in the 70s. It came at a time when organizations and associations everywhere were having to recalibrate, restructure, step back, reframe themselves, and find new kinds of talent to lead them."

Transformation of the Discipline

"In the 70s, we were still calling training, training. The term human resource development was coined in the early 70s by Len Nadler, who was a professor of adult education at George Washington University. I can remember - it was at an ASTD meeting - when he said for the first time, we should call all of this human resource development...'Hey, I think I've coined a term,' he said.

"What the association was grappling with in the late 70s was the transformation of our discipline from the narrowness of training to the more inclusive place in this discipline of human resources and trying to find our place, trying to find our identity. This was threatening to some people. It was confusi...it was exciting...it was challenging...it was fun."

"At that point the organization was searching for a new brand identity. It did not have competency models. But the association responded to what was going on inside the members' companies, and those companies were in turn responding to the competitive and environmental pressures of the time."

Other Debates: International Presence, Location

"One dynamic that happened was that the professional identity of the field changed from training to the broader HRD identification. A second issue was the

internationalization of the association: were we going to establish ASTD chapters in other countries, or were we going to encourage the development of an international federation of training and development and the development of associations like ASTD in other countries? That was a great debate. I took the position that we should support training and development organizations forming in other countries. That was not the popular view, but that was ultimately what the association did." As part of an AID grant, ASTD helped to establish the International Federation of Training and Development Organizations (IFTDO).

"When I was on the board of directors in the 70s, the association was geographically placed in Madison, Wisconsin. Yet it became apparent that to have an influence in the field, we needed to talk about things like defining best practices and becoming the voice of the profession. How do we define best practices, and be credible, and be the voice of the profession when all the other HR associations are physically located in Washington, DC? How do we become the voice of the profession when the people we need to influence are in Washington, DC - they're in the Congress and in other associations. That was another major debate."

Strategic Plan

"A fourth theme was an internal one: we had to restructure the organization to make it more efficient and move it more into technology. All of this led to my working with a team of people and the board to create a strategic plan. The strategic plan was designed to take the beginning steps to in fact make ASTD the voice of the profession, first by moving it to Washington, DC - which was not the widely held preference of the members.

And, we began to define the profession and the best practices within the profession, and this led to the first competency model effort (published in 1983), which was led by Pat McLagan."

ASTD Now

"ASTD has come a long way. It's exactly where it needs to be. It has excellent leadership, a great board of directors. Its programs are on point. And I think it *has* become the voice of the profession. It's a very admirable organization. It went from being a network, with something like a club atmosphere, to an organization with a lot of stature and professional recognition."

Jan Margolis is managing director and co-founder of Applied Research Corporation, which for 15 years has delivered assessment, coaching, transition leadership, and performance management services. Before co-founding the firm, she was senior vice president, executive resources, at Bristol-Myers Squibb. At Bankers Trust Company, Jan managed the professional development and placement of senior executives and other programs. She holds a master's degree in behavioral science from Boston University.

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