

2008 ALA REGION 5 CONFERENCE

How does one begin to describe the experience of their first conference in paradise?

Yes, it was the sun, the ocean, the sights and smells and tastes of Hawaii.

But it was also the people/networking and the learning. Strengthening existing relationships, and making new friends. Sharing common challenges, and gaining new perspectives.

It is difficult to select one session, or one component of the conference, that was most meaningful and insightful. Each moment – each interaction – had value.

The welcome luau, while moved indoors due to weather, was a wonderful introduction to the conference experience. The entertainment and music were culture specific, as was the Hawaiian chant opening Friday's sessions. The keynote speaker, Rosa Say, a native of Hawaii, was also a good choice to open our minds to the Hawaiian way of life and mindset. Rosa introduced us to the Hawaiian words for common values that we must seek to integrate into our workplace. Values determine behaviour, and the firm's values must match one's own to be authentic and enjoy one's work.

The next session, "Conquering the Multigenerational Divide," was a good reminder of the need to tailor rewards and recognition for the multiple generations currently in the workplace.

"Using Hawaiian Values in Managing Conflict" was also interesting and well-presented, but I was left a little uncertain of how to apply the principles in another culture and within a workplace setting.

"Substance Abuse: what do you do after you recognize the symptoms?" was imminently applicable, and the advice given was also relevant within a Canadian context. The class size (12 or so participants) allowed for a high degree of interaction with the facilitator, Gary Farkas.

Following the incredible experience of a Waikiki beach Hallowe'en, Saturday was a fresh start with more interesting sessions and speakers. Pat Gilead hosted an interesting round table discussion on Canadian issues, mostly related to the economic downturn and impact on Canadian business.

"Diversity: Transcultural Communication Competencies," with Stella Ting-Toomey, was a timely reminder of how different cultures have varied communication styles, and differing values. Dr. Ting-Toomey contrasted Western individualistic values with collectivistic cultural values, as well as tips for communicating with those of different cultures, on both a verbal and nonverbal level.

The next session with a humorous look at nonverbal communication by a dynamic speaker, Barry Maher. It was a good reminder to ensure that our nonverbal communication is matching the message we intend to deliver with our words.

Finally, Rosa Sayer spoke at the closing session on management v. leadership. She once again encouraged us to live out our values in the workplace, and inspire others to live out their own.

I will always hold fond memories of my first of hopefully many conferences. I would also like to get involved in planning one in the future. Pat Gilead mentioned this is a way to contribute to the association, and ensure the Canadian voice is being heard.

Thanks to CALA and Bennett Jones for the opportunity to attend.