

Remembering Ray Fowler

By Daniel Dodgen, Ph.D.

When I sat down to write this article, I began—in typical academic style—to outline the ways that Ray Fowler contributed to the field of psychology and served as a leader in the field. These things are true, of course. As psychology continues to grow across disciplinary and national borders, Ray Fowler was one of the few recent psychologists to claim international recognition in organized psychology. But Ray’s impact was more than that. He was a colleague, a mentor, a great example of leadership, and a strong advocate for international psychology.

When I first met Ray, I had completed my Ph.D. only two years before and was beginning a year-long fellowship working as a policy fellow in the United States House of Representatives. Although I was very early in my career, Ray always treated me as a colleague. He was genuinely excited about psychologists working in public policy and, while he had had a long academic career himself, he was incredibly supportive of people taking “non-traditional” career paths. He recognized that psychology should be “given away,” and he encouraged me to do so.

Following my year with the U.S. Congress, I joined the staff at the American Psychological Association (APA) and continued to work at the intersection of psychology and public policy. During that time, Ray was the Chief Executive officer for APA and I had the opportunity to work with him on many projects. This included co-authoring chapters, developing presentations for leaders, and handling organizational crises. All large organizations experience challenges, and APA faced some significant ones during Ray’s tenure. No matter the obstacles he faced, he always remained the same—thoughtful, respectful of different opinions, and even-tempered. His leadership style—collegial but still decisive—was a model for psychologists who take on significant administrative responsibilities. Furthermore, unlike many people who achieve elevated positions, Ray was quick to share credit. When we co-authored a chapter for a handbook on professional development (“Getting Involved in Professional Organizations: A Gateway to Career Advancement”) he insisted that I take first authorship because “you did more of the writing.” It was as simple as that for him.

The title of our chapter also illustrates how committed Ray was to involvement in professional organizations as a key to professional growth. I think it was this commitment that led to his willingness to greatly expand the role of graduate students within APA, not only including them as members, but including them in leadership and governance. Ray genuinely believed that psychologists acting together could achieve more than they could do acting independently. Toward this end, he led the APA for many years, well past most people’s retirement age. He did this because he believed in the power of organized psychology. It was this commitment, I believe, that led to his increased role in international psychology. Just as he recognized how organized psychology could positively impact the profession and our society in the United States, he recognized that psychology could have a greater impact for good in the world.

While Ray did not have the chance to complete his leadership term with IAAP, he did leave us a legacy. He modeled for us the importance of psychologists working together to enhance the field and the world around us. As a clinical psychologist committed to applying psychological science to social and policy questions, and committed to improving the field through international collaboration, I believe I am applying lessons taught me by Ray Fowler. And I believe any member of IAAP can do the same.

References

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