

London Calling...The 2010 PPMA Conference

I had the privilege, along with IPMA-HR President Maggie Whelan, of representing IPMA-HR at the 2010 Public Sector People Manager's Association (PPMA) conference in London, England from March 20-21. The theme of the conference was "The Global Skills Race". As I reviewed the program of the conference and began to interact with delegates, I was amazed how relevant and engaging the topics were to a human resources practitioner from the United States. Even though we were over 3,000 miles apart, our issues, challenges, and concerns are almost identical. These issues were summed up well by PPMA President Dean Shoesmith during his opening remarks. Dean used a highly interactive opening "speech" to highlight the challenges of supervisory training for mid and upper level managers, interpersonal communication skills, and effective organizational development. President Shoesmith challenged the attendees to take what they learned at the conference and use it to improve their organizations and employees. Following Dean Shoesmith's opening remarks, delegates listened to Dr. Dennis Kimbro's keynote speech. Dr. Kimbro is already a well-known and well-liked speaker in IPMA-HR circles, but was a bit of an unknown commodity to the PPMA audience. Despite that, he quickly captured the delegate's attention and interest with his passionate oratory on the subject of leadership development and risk taking.

As the theme "The Global Skills Race" indicates, the primary purpose of the conference was to better prepare the public sector human resources professionals and their organizations for the challenges of the next decade. Keeping with the theme, some of the sessions and master classes that were held over the two day conference included the topics of leadership and innovation; getting the most from your workforce; employee engagement; motivation and development of future leaders; aligning organizational development and business requirements; and creativity and skills development.

The conference's closing remarks were made by Richard Gerver, former lead education advisor to Tony Blair. His presentation on creativity and innovation in human development was an excellent summation of the entire conference. Mr. Gerver's command of the stage and passionate delivery was a perfect bookend to Dr. Dennis Kimbro's opening session. Mr. Gerver challenged the delegates to take risks and get out of our comfort zone. He took the full 90 minutes for his presentation, and I can speak for everyone in the room that we would have listened for another 90 minutes.

In addition to the excellent conference programming, PPMA has a robust awards program that is conducted over two evenings. The first evening's program consisted of 9 awards for PPMA regions, member organizations, and individual members. The second evening's event was a gala black-tie dinner recognizing outstanding advertising activities in 17 categories. The spirit and camaraderie generated by the two events was incredible. The ceremonies were part award show and part pep rally.

As with IPMA-HR events, one of the highlights of the PPMA conference was the opportunity to network with fellow human resources professionals and vendors. Over the course of the two days of the conference, I was fortunate to interact with dozens of delegates from England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. These conversations have given me an entirely new perspective on how to approach human resources issues back in the United States. I hope that I had a similar impact on my colleagues "across the pond."

In closing, I want to thank IPMA-HR and PPMA for granting me this amazing opportunity. In particular I want to thank PPMA President Dean Shoesmith, PPMA Past-President Gillian Hibberd, and PPMA Executive Director John Tonks for making me feel welcome to their conference and their country. It is said that travel broadens the mind and breaks down barriers. This experience has illustrated that expression to me first hand and that we are all participants in the "Global Skills Race."