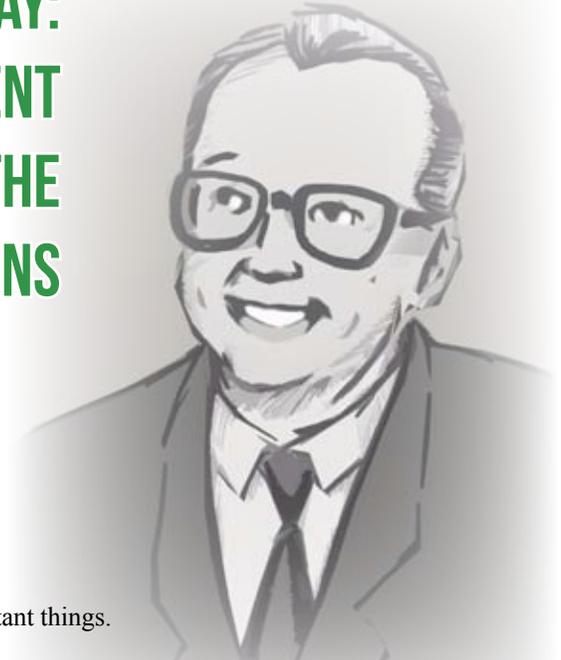


# WE'VE COME A LONG, LONG WAY: FORMER NAFA PRESIDENT PATRICK J. SHEEHAN REFLECTS ON THE ASSOCIATION'S GROWING PAINS



The strength of any endeavor; be it a business, an organization, or an association, starts with a strong foundation anchored deeply in purpose and in the tenacity to maintain that purpose through the best and worst times, and Former NAFA President Patrick J. Sheehan, Director of Corporate Fleet, Baxter Healthcare (retired), Barrington, IL has seen every bit. Through it all he has exemplified the values NAFA stands for, and continues to strive for, even after his tenure now more than a quarter-century away.

Sheehan was NAFA President from 1983 to 1985 and is credited during his tenure for surpassing the total membership mark of 2,500 for the Association, a high-point for NAFA at that time. He has served in most of the key positions within the Association, and has been an advocate for the value of the fleet professional to business through his entire career. Many of his beliefs continue on in NAFA's ongoing Beyond Fleet campaign, with the central theme being that the fleet manager is the nexus of all the different elements required to make a business work.

**Recognizing The Value Of Fleet** - "A big problem, for some fleets even to this day, is that they don't have the necessary education and the necessary programs," Sheehan said by phone. "Companies and corporations grow and grow but the information is not maintained in one place. It all gets spread out and disorganized, but orga-

nization is one of the most important things. You must put this all together."

What ultimately would become tenets of NAFA's education program, the core disciplines, still are questions Sheehan recalls and insists must be answered by every knowledgeable fleet professional in order to truly excel. "What have you got; why have you got it; where is it; and what condition is it in? There must be somebody watching over all of this, they must be able to support this, and then present it all to management." That person, Sheehan maintains, is the fleet manager.

Sheehan was also instrumental in the development of the Certified Fleet Manager (CFM) program via the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania; a precursor to what would ultimately become NAFA's Certified Automotive Fleet Manager (CAFM) program, recognized today as the industry standard for fleet education. He noted with a laugh that summing up the knowledge base of the day would be "impossible to do" because very little of it had been centralized enough to make a teachable curriculum out of it. "NAFA had already put together a hardcover manual when we were talking with Wharton - if I recall correctly, this was around 1980. We mailed that manual around, and that was one heavy book!"

"But we were really interested in developing something higher, something even

our individual companies might say, 'hey, that's quite a thing!' This was all to raise the respect and the profile of the fleet manager (in the eyes of the business world). And that's how we got into Wharton."

**The Recognized Industry Standard** - The baby steps were, according to Sheehan, extremely tenuous and he refuses to take the lion's share of credit for it. The point-person for Wharton was S. Lester Landau, a Distinguished Service Award winner, an Honorary Member of NAFA, and in Sheehan's opinion was, "a genius, very educated, a very terrific person. He was like a god to us."

In 1957 Landau was one of the founding members of NAFA alongside of his duties as Budget Director for Picker X-Ray in White Plains, NY. He concurrently assumed responsibility for the management of the company's fleet.

Landau was also one of the founders of the NAFA Foundation and was elected its first president in 1976. During his years with the NAFA Foundation, Landau devoted his dual passions for promoting fleet education and NAFA itself to efforts to make fleet management a part of the curriculum at major universities, one of which had been Wharton.

CONT'D ON PG. 17

## FORMER NAFA PRESIDENT PATRICK SHEEHAN

CONT'D FROM PG. 2

“He thought that anything NAFA could get from the school certainly would cause your management to think more of you,” Sheehan said. “He came back to the Board and he laid it all out for them.” The result was the Wharton Certified Automotive Fleet Manager program, a one-week course consisting of five days and nights of intensive study.

Sheehan would love to say the plan was a runaway success, but the requirements of the program as well as its singular location, nearly killed it in its infancy. “Too few Members were able to get authorization to go. The program dribbled along and wasn’t getting anywhere. Wharton came back to us and said, ‘we’re not making money on this and there are only a handful of people (enrolling) for this big program we’ve put together,’” Sheehan said. “Other people came but couldn’t stay for the entire week.”

Sheehan and Landau were posed with an option that ultimately would reshape the direction NAFA would go from there on out. “Les asked (the school) what it would take to make the program work, and their response was that it might be best if NAFA went ahead and did something on their own with it...and at that point we created (the basis for) what you have now.”

**Standing By You And Fighting For You** - The bio for Patrick Sheehan reads more like a list of all the positions one could hold within the Association, but he insists that his affinity stems from his fervent belief in what NAFA is and what it does for fleet management. “Shortly after I joined Baxter Healthcare in 1967, the CEO suggested I might be interested in a fairly new organization for fleet administrators called NAFA. I decided he was right and became a member,” Sheehan recalled. “Can you believe, back then, power options was the big issue?”

Through a steady and relatively quick window of time, Sheehan became invaluable to NAFA as it grew. “1971 was a busy year. I became Chapter Chair in Chicago, and was asked to be NAFA Conference Chair that same year.”

“In 1974, I became a Trustee, moved along into the chairs and eventually became President in 1983.” He was later a recipient of NAFA’s Distinguished Service Award in 1988. It was not always a position covered in glory and achievement. In earlier times, Sheehan recalled being summoned to Washington D.C. to take part in a conference devoted to giving structure to this growing vocation of fleet – at least, that was what he thought was happening.

“We got there and found that the people in Washington were going to tell us what to do and what not to do, and everybody there was in shock that these young whiz-kids were going to sit there and tell us what we’re to do!” The conversation about how each type of fleet, the variations that could occur between different sorts of businesses, different regions, and much more, was a non-starter. “They were saying, ‘I’ll tell you where you can buy your fuel, and how much fuel, and so on. It was a very bad day.’”

Frustrated that key elements of their own profession were being taken out of their hands, Sheehan said, “They annoyed us to the point where, before we were leaving, I raised my hand and asked what would happen if we all just turned in our auto fleets? The leader of their group stood up and said we wouldn’t do it. We said we could simply sell off the cars to the drivers, make them private, and close off the fleets. What would you do then?” Indignant, the leader of this group stormed out of the conference room and did not bother the proceedings again, his intimidation tactics seemingly failed.

**Respect** – Patrick J. Sheehan saw the lows and the highs both inside and outside of the Association, yet remembers both with a certain level of affection. “I think it’s astonishing, thinking back to 1967 when I started going to the (chapter) meetings and began to catch on. They didn’t have a secretary for the meetings, so they asked me.”

“I am honored to have served with, and learned from, these most competent men, who were considered more than business associates, but friends. And we’ve come a long, long way...and very successfully as far as I’m concerned.” Sheehan’s ad-

vice to the future of fleet is consistent with those when he and leaders like Les Landau were asserting the legitimacy of fleet management to the business realm. “Train; educate; get people (into the position) who will really work at it, who are respected, and deserve the respect.”

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## KEYS TO EFFECTIVE COACHING

CONT'D FROM PG. 14

Subordinates are expected to identify problems and pinpoint their own performance shortcomings, developmental needs, and career goals. Effective coaches do not betray these trusts. Doing so damages relationships and the coaching process.

### High integrity coaches:

- Correct in private
- Do not discuss problems of one employee with another
- Do not discuss employee problems with other coaches
- Keep personnel file information confidential
- Keep any necessary disclosures as confidential as possible

An effective coach keeps commitments. Keeping commitments provides not only reinforcement but also recognition of improvement. The coachee who is recognized for improving is more likely to continue to improve than one whose improvement goes unnoticed. Many managers have an unwritten standard: they expect their subordinates to be loyal to them. Good coaches know that loyalty is earned through trust.

In his book *Effective Coaching*, Marshall J. Cook maintains that effective coaching moves an employee from WIIFM (What’s in it for me?) to WIIFU (What’s in it for us?). In other words, an effective coach creates a win-win situation for the employee, the organization, and himself or herself.

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