MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Playing Where the Puck is Going to Be
By Ted Donnelly, Ph.D., PRC

OK, I admit I’m not a big fan of sports analogies. Let’s get that on the table right off the bat, so to speak. There is something a bit lazy about using them in business discourse. Perhaps the parallels can be coerced into the dialogue a trifle too easily for my liking. Motivationalprodding to give the full court press, swing for the fences or go to the mat makes my eyes glaze over just as a smidge. The metaphor works, of course, but the encouragement feels overly contrived.

If, however, the sports idiom is derived from ice hockey, I’m likely to give it a free pass. Since I was a boy, I have just always loved the history, traditions and culture surrounding the sport. Between two sons and my own feeble attempts at greatness in a men’s league, I am in an ice rink more days than not. The rink is my top creditor right after my mortgage lender. It is also my community center, social club and the special place where I spend quality time with my kids.

For hockey families, the rink is where many life lessons are conceived. In the late 1960s, one piece of advice with a lasting impact was passed from father to son in the sleepy town of Brantford located in Southern Ontario. The mentor was a man named Walter. He counseled his son Wayne with the following guidance, “A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be.” When asked to what he attributed his monumental success, the Great One often points to this guidance he received from his father, Walter Gretzky.

As we turn the page and look ahead to another year at MRA, this advice to anticipate the play couldn’t be any more sage. The marketing research industry is evolving at a transformational pace and our association is adapting to the changing demands of the profession. Last year, the MRA Strategy Task Force completed a strategic plan for our board of directors to provide guidance and focus for the next 3-5 years. While it will continue to evolve, it has served as our beacon to guide decision making and help forecast where we can best serve the needs of our members.

One of the key strategic pillars that will continue to be a focal point is “thought and advocacy leadership.” This pillar truly encompasses the altruistic purpose of our association’s mission, which is to vigorously support and advocate for our members’ professional growth and success. While government advocacy is the most visible example and is absolutely crucial to an industry largely carried by small and medium sized enterprises, it also includes the professionalization of our industry through PRC certification and MRA’s Code of Marketing Research Standards. Other examples of advocacy leadership provided by MRA include promoting the value of marketing research to the business community and public at large through contemporary media channels and having a voice when the methods for gathering insights are scrutinized.

In the coming year, our educational and networking offerings will continue to arouse innovation. In just a few short weeks, MRA will host the 2014 Corporate Researchers Conference at McCormick Place in Chicago. This has become the must attend event on the research calendar as the only conference created by and for corporate researchers. This event will be chock full of ingenuity from 50+ speakers, including high-level keynotes representing distinguished household brands, and six exclusive sessions for corporate researchers. In February, industry business leaders will congregate in Napa for MRA’s biennial CEO Summit. Here they will share insight, ideas and inspiration for leading research organizations well into a bright future for the profession. Our annual Insights & Strategies Conference (ISC) will be held in June 2015, focused on honing attendees’ applied research skills and educating the audience on the latest trends and tools in the insight provider space.

Another initiative on our agenda is to work in tandem with our chapter leadership to enrich the local MRA educational and networking experience nationwide, while alleviating the pain points in chapter management and administration. For many of our members, access to national events is unavailable leaving local programming as their primary professional development outlet. As of this writing, a committee comprised of past and current leadership representing all of our chapters is assembling to map out a plan to revamp the administration of our chapter affiliates to better meet the needs of our membership universally. Thankfully, we have an incredible group of dedicated volunteers across the nation vested in the member benefits received at the local level. The committee is motivated to ensure we have a dynamic local level experience for our membership and a better system of collaboration between affiliates and the national organization to help attain our vision as the unifying body in the industry.

With the continued support of the profession, MRA will continue to find the open ice. Join us for what should be an exciting ride. Only with a good game plan and everyone rowing in the same direction can we hope to go the distance. Remember, it’s a marathon, not a sprint. 

Ted Donnelly, Ph.D., PRC, is the managing director of Baltimore Research and the Chairman of MRA’s Board of Directors.