

ANCA provides important peer connections, a great example is the professional friendship that exists between two ANCA members, Jason Meyer, President and CEO of Blandford Nature Center and Susan Westhoff, Executive Director of Leslie Science & Nature Center.

Jason and Susan met at a crucial time in both their careers. Both were relatively new to their jobs and realized their nature centers had similar growing pains and that they could use each other as sounding boards, sources of ideas and advice, and inspiration.

“At Fenner Conservancy, where I worked formerly, we were still in the early growth stages of our nonprofit being the managing entity. We were rebranding, rebuilding our board, and starting to implement a bona fide fundraising plan. Our center had been on the cusp of closing until our nonprofit began to manage it, and we had a LOT of work to do” says Jason.

Susan agreed, “Ditto in many ways – LSNC was relatively newly transitioned into a nonprofit after being with the city for two decades. We were working on solidifying our budgeting process, coming up with fundraising direction and defining who we are and how we were moving forward with a solid board and staff.”

Their professional relationship gave them someone in their corner they could trust with just about anything. Such as, Jason admitted, “those things that you can’t say to board members, your family, or even your therapist....Susan is always there with words of advice, encouragement, or caution when I need them. I would say this is true of many of my “professional” relationships in ANCA - they also become deeply personal. When somebody “gets it” - the stress of the job, the complexities of managing a nonprofit, the impact of all of this on your personal life - that person becomes an incredible asset to your life.”

Susan agreed, “Sometimes just having someone I could talk out loud to, allowed me to get outside of my own head and see the priorities more clearly. Other times, Jason was able to be a much-needed mirror, to reflect back and push my comfort zone or challenge my priorities. It is immensely helpful to have someone you trust and whose opinion you trust, to be that reflection.”

“As an organization, ANCA has been great at linking me to people who can answer very specific questions,” explained Jason. “My mentor, Dave Catlin, helped me considerably during the time that I was seeking new employment, including advice on career paths, how to communicate my decision to my board, and more. Summit sessions always seemed to be timely for me, too - there is so much to learn!”

“ANCA really linked me to the resources I needed to feel comfortable staying in the nature center field,” said Susan. “I have peers, and they are accessible, and they are supportive, and that is a pretty phenomenal thing in this day and age.”

“Being a nature center administrator requires such a wide breadth of knowledge,” explained Jason. “Being able to reach out to another administrator whose farm is doing well, or a director who has closed out his seventh successful multi-million dollar campaign, or any other specific need not only helps me and my center, but our profession as a whole. We really are all in this together, and to me, that’s the beauty of ANCA. We can each be in our own place, yet also be part of the movement to make our world a better place to live.”

