

Shari Leventhal: Pitching in to Support CSE

Jonathan Schultz

Having worked at the American Society of Nephrology (ASN) for 20 years, Shari Leventhal has seen a lot of change in scholarly societies and scientific publishing. Beginning in the Communications department at ASN, Shari became a Managing Editor in 2012 for the *Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology* (CJASN) and then the Executive Editor of the ASN portfolio of journals in March 2019. As she begins her term as the President of the Council of Science Editors, Shari spoke with Science Editor about her goals for CSE this year, the importance of accessibility, and the need to sometimes step up and get things done.

Science Editor: How did you get involved in scientific editing and publishing, and what career path led to your current position?

Shari Leventhal: My background was in communications, and I was working in public relations for ASN, but I didn't really love the pressure of being put on the spot. My supervisor at the time was looking for a second Managing Editor to assume oversight for the clinical journal, and believed that my skill set would be the perfect fit to manage the journal. When she approached me with the opportunity, I was intrigued. I love managing multiple projects at once and improving efficiency. Additionally, I had worked with the Editor in Chief previously and liked him quite a bit. I thought that if I was going to move into scholarly publishing, he would be a great EIC to work with.

SE: What do you enjoy most about your career? What challenges do you face?

Leventhal: I love working with my team at ASN to improve efficiency and identify potential resolutions to problems, especially within a submission system where system modifications can improve author and/or editor ease, time



to decision, and more. I am also extremely fortunate to work with fantastic colleagues and editors.

It is challenging to know that not everyone will agree and/or like all the decisions I make, but I am guided by knowing that I am making the best recommendations and decisions for the entire ASN journal portfolio.

SE: Let's shift a bit and talk about CSE. In May 2023, you're starting your term as CSE President. What has CSE meant to you and what are you looking forward to doing as president?

Leventhal: When I became a managing editor, I had no previous experience in scholarly publishing. CSE was recommended to me by my supervisor. I attended the Short Course for Publications Management and the Annual Meeting in 2012 and felt, for the first time in my professional life, that I had finally found my home, in terms of networking and education. Additionally, I finally understood that working in scholarly publishing was exactly where I was meant to be.

I am grateful to Mary (Billingsley) and Jennifer (Deyton) for the work they did during their presidencies to help prepare CSE for a fresh beginning in partnership with CSE's new management company, Riggs Enterprises and our Executive Director, Lauren Schoener-Gaynor and am excited to work with Lauren and all of the CSE Board and committee members to continue implementation of our strategic plan.

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SE: Are there areas of the strategic plan you intend to focus on?

Leventhal: Given its importance, when we developed the strategic plan, we wove diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) into the fabric of the plan. We're really looking at DEIA with a holistic approach across the entire strategic plan, ensuring that it touches every single committee and every single aspect of what we do at CSE.

SE: What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in the industry, and where do you see scientific editing and publishing heading?

Leventhal: ASN recently transitioned from self-publishing to commercial publishing. We are not alone in recognizing that it is becoming increasingly harder to navigate the changing landscape of publishing independently. Changes are happening rapidly in the industry in a variety of ways, including accessibility of articles and data, ethics, and more. I think accessibility is one of the largest areas where there is constant change. More than just being about access to specific content, it's about whether the article is visually (or audibly) accessible to everyone, that deposited data is accessible to other researchers, and that it is understandable to a broad audience when needed.

Additionally, authors have many choices of where to publish, and despite the changes and requirements, journals must continue to make their home a welcome place for authors.

SE: What skills, abilities, and personal attributes have you found to be essential to success in your job/this field?

Leventhal: I would say the number one skill that I remain committed to is customer service. If you can respond to people in a timely manner and provide helpful feedback, then that will go a long way. When I was just starting out in my career and attending an annual meeting—when I left for the airport until I got home—I was conscious that I was representing the society. I didn't necessarily know who I

would see who was an ASN member. Having been at ASN for 20 years, I still have people that I may not necessarily remember, but they remember me from the annual meeting and continue to contact me for support. These meeting attendees are often authors, reviewers, editors, or readers, and they want to contribute to the society or an ASN journal, in part, because ASN helped them.

It is also important to have a willingness to just pitch in and get something done. If the team is taxed on something, it doesn't matter to me, whether it is a general administrative function or if it's something at a higher level, everything has to get done. If someone on my team needs help, then I'm going to pitch in and help them out to get it done. It's important to be able to multitask, have a passion for scholarly publishing and your organization, and a sense of humor.

SE: Can you tell our readers something that might surprise us about you?

Leventhal: My husband and I met on the dating site JDate and have been married for almost 19 years and have two sons, Henry (16) and Ryan (11).

SE: Wow, congratulations. As a final question, if we were talking this time next year, what would you consider to be a successful outcome for your presidency at CSE?

Leventhal: I think that if we can have a successful, well-attended Annual Meeting, Fall Symposium, and more regular webinars and short courses, and if all those events can happen in a timely, more consistent manner, then I'll feel like we've had a successful year. I also want to make sure that all our committee co-chairs feel supported and can accomplish what they want to do because we have a lot of volunteers who want to contribute in a positive manner and feel supported. It's been tough the last couple of years, but now that we have a strong association management company, I believe that we'll have a lot more opportunity to be able to implement all the programs that we want. If we can do that, I'll consider it a very strong and successful year.