

Perspectives on Exhibiting (Generally)

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The Malmö 2nd International Philatelic Summit was conducted 27-29 April 2012. As shared in the preface of other Papers, this was a well-attended event with delegates from around the world. Comments from delegates indicate that it was not only informative but entertaining as the speakers demonstrated sharp minds and humor within their exhibiting expertise. There were no sacred cows that the speakers or delegates had to carefully walk around; no orthodoxy to uphold. The discussions were robust and revealing. Many delegates shared that they intend to attend again in April 2014.

The Summit is a "destination event" for philatelists, who shows up even though no medals are being handed out! The interest in exhibiting in all of its facets is so strong, that people dedicated a whole weekend to the formal presentations with 'Questions & Answers' and informal discussions that peppered the three days. A number of delegates found that the Philatelic Summit provided opportunities for meeting and re-connecting with others that made the whole experience a highly enjoyable social weekend (even though on a pretext of philatelic learning). Any serious philatelist is welcome, the only qualifications being one's interest in philately, combined with a sense of fraternity and inquisitiveness – your normal type of philatelic gathering.

When we started this series of Philatelic Summit Papers as a prelude to the second Summit, James Peter Gough RDP, FRPSL (widely known in the philatelic world as "Jamie") wrote the first Paper entitled: "The Ever-Changing Paradigm of Philatelic Exhibiting." That first Paper focused on the author's near 50-years of observations pertaining to the changes in exhibiting and its regulations as well as how exhibitors have dealt with those changes (or been dealt with by them!). Jamie also shared various techniques in his own exhibiting style that delegates found fascinating.

When Jamie gave his presentation to the Summit in Malmö, I realized (as the editor of the Summit Paper Series) that Jamie was not even close to finished in all that he could share. There are few philatelists who have been as consistently active in exhibiting over such a long period of time as Jamie. As he humorously stated, "I look pretty good for a man of 92, don't I?" So I asked him to write another Paper on the elements and philosophies of exhibiting that he shared with a packed room in a style of delivery that kept the audience fully enthralled throughout.

Jamie presents in this Paper a "thinking process" for competitive exhibitors: personal paradigms for every exhibitor to hold for personal fulfillment as well as philatelic success; exhibiting approaches, topics and styles that impact the probability of success; the written and informal thought processes of jury members, etc. – all based on his experiences as a long time philatelist, exhibitor and judge. He writes in a straight-forward style and deals with the challenges one encounters in philatelic exhibiting regardless of whether it is a Traditional or Postal History subject.

In this Paper, Jamie doesn't only refer to his own exhibit, but also to a number of other top exhibits by other internationally recognized exhibitors. These illustrations from other exhibitors are suitable references for the points he makes about exhibiting being an effort with the distinctiveness in style and approach as individualized as one's own signature. When one reads both of Jamie's ground-breaking Papers together, they combine to form a baseline with theories and practices for philatelic exhibiting that are useful for most exhibitors – but are also entertaining, particularly in his side-comments and footnotes.

I have never met anyone else who can explain the psychology behind judging and competing in philately to the depth that Jamie can – and certainly not with his dry sense of humor about it. Additionally, Jamie is a great, easy-to-read writer whose use of metaphors not only gets concepts across to the reader – as all great teachers or consultants can do – but also puts a smile on your face in experiencing it in the story-telling mode that he is now famous for. Enjoy!

*Jonas Hällström
Editor & Chairman of the
"International Philatelic Summit" in Malmö*

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Before the second Philatelic Summit in Malmö this past April 2012, I had written the first Paper at the request of Jonas Hällström (and others) to share my perspectives on philatelic exhibiting from the almost 50 years of my participation in this “sport.” Jonas’s goal was that Paper #1 would fuel awareness, ideas, imagination and dialogues among the delegates to the second Philatelic Summit.

I think Jonas’s goal may have been realized if the responses and the numbers of reprints are any indication. In any case, it has launched a series of Papers by some of Philately’s most distinguished and thoughtfully conscious exhibitors, all of whom I admire greatly.

When I finished Paper #1, I thought it would be exceedingly boring for the participants at the Summit to merely hear me read to them what they had already read. I could not envision that I would be “reading” my Paper to the delegates – a process that would by no small means test everyone’s politeness.

So I prepared a presentation that was different from the first Paper: the first Paper being more the history and development of exhibiting that I witnessed along with some techniques for laying out exhibit pages versus this Paper, which focuses on the “thinking” that goes into being an exhibitor and competing philatelically.

But as a good Polish friend of mine says, “No good deed goes un-punished.” My punishment is that I have now been asked to present yet another Paper – but one on what I actually said! So here it is

Special note

As a special note to the reader, I am a former management consultant. In consulting, there is a technique of stating a “fact” or “idea” in its simplest of terms. The purpose of this approach is to strip away all of the clutter that often gets in the way of seeing things clearly; a means of understanding a concept at its most basic essence.

The stripping away of the clutter is a process that may make an idea initially seem unattractive or even ridiculous on first glance – which is not the goal as much as it is a consequence sometimes. Reactions are often, “That is not what it means!”

But the goal of this process is to go to the most basic of understandings of an idea (or even unconscious perception of it) so that all the participants in the discussion will be able to start their dialogue with a common definition (even if they do not agree with the implied or stated interpretation of the idea).

This approach triggers serious dialogue. We know from experience that this is true because of the rising blood pressure in the group that can be readily felt in the room. But the benefit of doing so is that the group then gets emotionally engaged in the discussion until there is a shared interpretation and understanding of the issue being discussed.

The pros and cons can then be more readily discussed as the ‘smoke screens’ and “polite ignoring of reality” are removed. The end result is deep thinking and brainstorming about even our strongly-held assumptions on how things work and how they might be able to work differently in order to reach the group’s intended goals.

I used this technique in the first Paper to great effect. But it also meant that some readers walked away thinking that the WHOLE paper was all about that ... one ... single ... stripped-down ... fact – that annoyed them tremendously.

So ... I caution readers to carefully consider all of my comments within the general context of this paper and not condemn me for laying bare the implied or subconsciously accepted perceptions that still function in whole or in parts of philatelic exhibiting and judging.

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James Peter Gough lives in California, where he is the founder and chairman of a bank in Orange County. He settled down there after a career in international banking and in bank/monetary-policy consulting. “Jamie” is a long time philatelist and exhibitor with philatelic interests around the globe. He is well recognized in philately, having won the USA’s Grand Prix National in 1992 (called the “Champions of Champions”), the FLAF Grand Prix of the Americas in 2008 and the FIP Grand Prix d’Honneur in Paris in 1999. In 2012 Jamie signed the Roll of Distinguished Philatelists in Perth, Scotland, the most prestigious recognition in philately.