



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Company We Keep

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

I'm starting to sound like a Midwesterner. After three years in Chicago, my southern accent is slipping away and my vowels are flattening out. I talk about the "El" and have become a pizza snob and think 33° is still jeans and t-shirt weather.

And yet, give me a few days at home in Georgia and the accent returns, then 55° starts to feel chilly, then you may even find me eating chain restaurant pizza.

Perhaps you are not this chameleon-like, but I think most of us start to adapt to the influences in our surroundings very, very quickly—and somewhat unconsciously. You see it when the honor student starts to hang out with the "wrong crowd" or perhaps feel it happening when you go back to your 25th high school reunion.

Put us in virtually any situation and we start to adapt—and can "adapt back" just as quickly when we return to our home base.

Those small examples remind me how important it is to pay attention to the people and influences we surround ourselves with. Little by little, day by day, those influences alter who we are—or at the very least how we think and act.

How do you feel when you return from a UCAOA conference? After spending four days with colleagues who are all walking the same path as you are in their own clinics?

Even though you may be tired and your head overwhelmed with information, what I hope you also feel is renewed and re-energized to go back home and slay some dragons. Surrounding yourself with "allies" who understand what you are going through can be a fantastic influence.

The challenging part, of course, is what to do when those influences (the "conference high") start to fade and you find yourself eating chain pizza again. How do you hang onto the influences you want when you are no longer surrounded by them?

As long as I have been in professional education, I have seen this struggle. It is hard to leave the chorus and go home and start singing a solo. You start "adapting back" to the existing environment without even realizing it, except for some vague sense of dissatisfaction and failure.

How do you keep the faith when you've left the spiritual retreat?

How can you be the influencer, vs. the influenced?

I think part of the answer is keeping one foot in the meeting/chorus/retreat even after you've left. Basically, keeping those connections alive so you can virtually surround yourself with the influences you want to hang onto. Friends don't let friends eat chain pizza.

I realize that heretofore we (UCAOA) have not done a great job at helping you do that, but very soon that is going to change. I can't say too much more at this point except, "stay tuned"—and become a member if you aren't one yet. The entire point of *association* is to associate, and I think you'll be as excited as I am to see the next level that's taking shape as we speak.

We're also excited about the *non-virtual*, face-to-face, head-filling, connection-making, re-energizing convention that will be here before you know it.

Aside from the fact that it's 23° degrees where I am and 73° in Orlando today, having been to a few of UCAOA's National Urgent Care Conventions I know that it's going to be a fantastic gathering—and this one is going to be better than ever. I hope you'll join us and make some new connections. The more, the merrier. ■



Lou Ellen Horwitz is executive director of the Urgent Care Association of America. She may be contacted at lhorwitz@ucaoa.org.

UCAOA members:

The 2010 election process for UCAOA Board of Directors will be starting soon. Watch your e-mail.