

Client: FIA/John Egnor  
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Chances are, you are already a member of at least one association that supports your primary area of specialty. That's outstanding – your industry association is a terrific place to network and stay on top of trends that affect your business. And your association represents your best interests, both inside the industry and to lawmakers and regulators.

But it's my strong belief that to really grow as a foodservice pro, you have to "reach across the aisle," as we so often hear the politicians say – and get to know people working outside your own professional backyard.

The idea that knowledge is itself power is as relevant today as it was when Francis Bacon coined the phrase, over 400 years ago. I am a firm believer that the more you learn – and the more willing you are to learn new things – the more successful you will be, both in work and in life in general.

An easy way to expand your point of view and gain instantaneous exposure to other areas in foodservice is to join organizations outside your main industry group. Getting involved with any association plugs you into the specific resources that particular group offers. You will discover another universe of people, problems, challenges and solutions that maybe you did not even know existed.

There is enormous value in both knowing what you know and knowing what you don't know. Establishing new association relationships is a very effective way to get the insight you need to make yourself better at what you do.

But how do you choose? Pragmatically, you could consider groups whose work interests you, groups that represent potential customers, or groups organized around a discipline in which you would like to develop your skills. Any approach will work because it's a virtual guarantee that you will learn new things when you get involved.

But I have an even better option. If you join just one additional association, I enthusiastically recommend that you consider Foodservice Institute of America.

Why FIA? As FIA's president, obviously I have an interest in building membership. But I can honestly say that my endorsement is driven by something larger and more significant: the real value I have witnessed our members take away from their FIA involvement.

There is a very simple explanation for that. FIA is open to all, regardless of industry, background, specialty or area of expertise. It's safe to say that FIA is the most professionally diverse association in the business – by design.

Our vision was to create a place where all are welcome to the table – encouraged to get involved, tell their stories, share their expertise and contribute to a comprehensive, universal clearing house of knowledge.

In a business environment where challenges often outnumber successes, joining FIA is a true win-win. It's inexpensive and it affords a practical opportunity for you to transcend your market and expose yourself to many more experts, far and wide.

And it comes with an even greater reward: as we gain new knowledge, insight and improve ourselves, the industry as a whole can only get better, too.

We know we're onto something. In its annual study of why professionals join groups, the Center for Association Leadership reports that the number one motivator is not individual gain or a straight cost-benefit calculation. Rather, the most important perceived value is community benefit – making the world a better place.

And building a better industry is what FIA is all about.

-John Egnor  
President, Foodservice Institute of America