*PALP Alumni Spotlight:

“Power of Influencers” by Gil Longwell, PALP IV

How did I get here? Retirement has given me the opportunity to reflect on the little things that measured alone were mostly insignificant but, as a body of influencers, empowered me to make meaningful contributions to others. While cleaning out my office, I came across the letter that follows.

I met Guy Temple when he addressed our PALP class in 1973 in Hazleton. He walked in (khaki pants and a wind breaker jacket zipped up) and just stood at the podium. The participants, talking amongst themselves, paid no attention and continued creating a din. After about a minute, he pulled out a police whistle and blew it shrilly. Then, in the stunned silence that he created, he introduced himself. From that day on, I called him (to myself), “WHISTLE!”

Several years later we shared a podium at a meeting of township officials. To make a point, he read a letter…

“Dear Sir, I am writing in response to your request for additional information in Block #3 of the accident reporting form. I put ‘Doing the Job Alone’ as the cause of my accident. You asked for a fuller explanation and I trust the following details will be sufficient. I am a bricklayer by trade. On the day of the accident, I was working alone on the roof of a new six-story building. When I completed my work, I found I had some bricks left over which when weighed later were found to weigh 240 lbs.

Rather than carry the bricks down by hand, I decided to lower them in a barrel by using a pulley which was attached to the side of the building at the sixth floor. Securing the rope at ground level, I went up to the roof, swung the barrel out and loaded the bricks into it. Then I went down and untied the rope, holding it tightly to insure a slow descent of the 240 lbs of bricks. You will note on the accident reporting form that my weight is 135 lbs. Due to my surprise at being jerked off the ground so suddenly, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope. Needless to say, I proceeded at a rapid rate up the side of the building.

In the vicinity of the third floor, I met the barrel which was now proceeding downward at an equally impressive speed. This explains the fractured skull, minor abrasions, and the broken collarbone, as listed in Section 3, accident reporting form. Slowed only slightly, I continued my rapid ascent, not stopping until the fingers of my right hand were two knuckles deep into the pulley which I mentioned in Paragraph 2 of this correspondence.

Fortunately, by this time I had regained my presence of mind and was able to hold tightly to the rope, in spite of the excruciating pain I was now beginning to experience. At approximately the same time, however, the barrel of bricks hit the ground—and the bottom fell out of the barrel. Now devoid of the weight of the bricks, the barrel weighed approximately 50 lbs. I refer you again to my weight. As you might imagine, I began a rapid descent down the side of the building. Near the third floor, I met the barrel coming up. This accounts for the two fractured ankles, broken tooth and severe lacerations of my legs and lower body. Here my luck began to change—slightly.

The encounter with the barrel seemed to slow me enough to lessen my injuries when I fell into the pile of bricks and fortunately only three vertebrae were cracked. I am sorry to report, however, as I lay there on the pile of bricks, in pain, unable to move and watching the empty barrel six stories above me, I again lost my composure and presence of mind and let go of the rope.

Please be assured I am finished ‘Doing the Job Alone.’”

Every time I read this letter, I think of Guy Temple, the “Whistle,” and how he, in a small part and the PALP program, in large part, changed me by making me a better problem solver and change agent. Stan Lembeck, Dave Kinsey, Bob Howell and others I encountered through PALP were key contributors as well.

To this day, I rely on the skills I learned in PALP, things that have enabled me to become a better contributor to those I encounter and life in general—usually by not doing the job alone. PALP was a life influencer for me, and was a great part of the answer to the opening question, “How did I get here?”

*PALP, the PA Public Affairs Leadership Program was RULE’s predecessor program from 1971 until 1978 and included five classes. They accrued 259 graduates to their credit. The first three years were one to three year programs, including an international seminar, and the last two PALP classes were two year programs without an international component. Notably, the inaugural PALP class took no female participants. Libertyville, a community issue simulation was introduced then and it is still a feature for each RULE class. Along with updated public issues, we created new role profiles & names. Truly, the alums of PALP implemented the vision of starting RULE in 1985 for RULE Class I. They became the “influencers.”