Executive Director’s Annual Report—1982–83

George M. Cate, Executive Director

I am so very pleased to see you here tonight. When we meet each year it is like a family reunion. And, thanks to you, the concept of family was reinforced very dramatically last Friday, when each and every AmSECT member felt moved to call home to the National Office to get such information as the New Orleans weather reports.

It was wonderful to hear from all of you, although next time if you could spread the calls out over a few days we would appreciate it.

Many of you who called also wanted to chit-chat about how the weather was in Reston and the cute things your kids had said in school last week. As you might imagine, simply because your National Office staff was in the last minute stages of preparing for the largest AmSECT meeting in history, we had ample time to catch up on how things were going with you and the problems you were having with your surgeon.

To prove how genuine our interest is in you, we certainly want to maintain future contact. All of you who called the National Office, please fill out a form when you leave the meeting today. Just simply indicate the date and time you expect to be pumping your next case, because that’s when your friendly National Office staff wants to call you back. Also, please indicate what days of the week you expect to be off work, as an alternate time.

Most especially though, you cannot imagine the comforting feeling your National Office staff has in knowing that each of you has an interest in personally managing every aspect of AmSECT and its annual meeting, down to the most minute detail. We were pleased to let you know that we did have contingency plans for a possible crisis, as we do for each meeting each year. Yes, we had insurance for Acts of God, although we find that insurance for acts of perfusionists is more difficult to obtain.

In short, we were pleased that you were pleased that basically what we were doing corresponded to your own detailed management plan for AmSECT.

It is, perhaps, apropos to say that this year AmSECT’s meeting was like 1,300 ants floating on a log down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, with each ant believing he was captain of the ship.

Well, anyway, my remarks this year will be short. I didn’t sleep too well last night because I had a nightmare. I dreamed that I was executive director of an organization that had the following operating characteristics:

- Every year a new president replaces the incumbent president.
- Every two years all other officers are replaced.
- Some of the staff are full-time employees, but the vast majority of the staff are volunteers, are located in dozens of cities throughout the country, and most contact is by telephone rather than face-to-face in the same office every day.
- None of the volunteer staff is paid.
- There are no major benefits to the volunteer staff.
- There is no profit motive.
- Most of the staff work all day in a stressful job before they can perform their volunteer work.

My dream was that St. Peter told me before I could enter heaven it was my responsibility to make sure this organization was a success, and then I woke up in a cold sweat because I realized that the organization was AmSECT.

As some of you may know, The Cate Corporation has provided management services to AmSECT since 1978, that we are a management consulting firm whose practice is mainly in advising large Federal agencies and corporations on management and financial systems. For example, we are currently advising the U.S. Navy concerning how to develop the largest payroll system in the United States, and we believe this diversity of experience is good because it provides a better perspective on organization management.
Three years ago a Harvard professor wrote an article for *Fortune* magazine, and he made a very surprising assertion. He said it is a more difficult challenge to manage a small business than a large national corporation. He pointed out that large organizations have functional specialists of all types who have the necessary expertise, and they are backed up by extensive financial resources.

In contrast, in small businesses one person, or a handful of persons, has to perform many difficult functions because there is neither the staff nor the resources to perform the work.

I believe his premise was absolutely correct, but I can top it. I believe the task of managing a volunteer, non-profit organization like AmSECT is the toughest management challenge of all.

And I believe that AmSECT is a laboratory model of what is required to be successful. As I see it, there are two main factors that can make it happen.

The first factor is a management system. In AmSECT we call it MBO, or Management-by-Objective. AmSECT has an MBO system in place now and it is highly detailed, almost to the point of being a cookbook.

The MBO system gives us a framework and a structure within which plans are made and carried out. You absolutely have to have some type of system in order to develop a sense of direction and to have some means for organizing your activities.

The second factor is leadership. I believe your strength is in your leaders. You have an abundance of them, in contrast to other organizations with whom we are familiar. My concept of a leader is someone who sees what has to be done and does it, and who is willing to bear more pain and make more sacrifices than he asks of those who follow him or her. You have these types of leadership in AmSECT.

In addition to these two factors, enough of the members must have a commitment to the organization to want to make it succeed. Last year at our meeting in Hollywood, Florida, I appealed to you to volunteer your time. What a pleasant experience it was to see that so many of you did respond. Any number of young, bright, energetic perfusionists came forward and were instrumental in producing some of the year’s finest accomplishments.

This is just tremendous! And to those of you who are interested this year, contact Gary Reeder and I’m sure he will give you an assignment in some meaningful area.

I mentioned to you a minute ago seven major problems in managing a nonprofit organization. AmSECT’s experience has been that motivated volunteers using an organized management system under the control of strong leaders can overcome these problems.

Take a good look at me up here because I believe I am unique. The thing that makes me unique is that, because I am your executive director, of necessity, I know just about everything that your volunteers do. I know of their problems, their concerns, and their aspirations for AmSECT.

But most of all, ladies and gentlemen, I know first-hand what your representatives do for you. For example, I know how they work for you when they have severe personal problems, or job-related problems. I know how they subordinate their personal plans to work for AmSECT.

In my church we have a humorous saying that goes like this: “I don’t care how much I suffer as long as somebody knows about it.” Well, it goes with the territory of being an AmSECT volunteer that you most definitely will suffer and it is likely that your sacrifice may go unobserved.

I think you ought to enact a policy that says that no one can say “What am I getting for my 50 bucks?” I would propose that it be illegal for anyone to ask that question until they have served in a serious capacity as an AmSECT volunteer.

This year’s officers, board members, and committees have set new standards of excellence. And it has mainly happened because they had the motivation and intelligence to do it. They took what is inherently the most difficult management situation one can conceive of, and they made it work beyond our expectations and hopes.

1982–83 was a good year for AmSECT by virtually any benchmark one would care to apply. And for what you have given us, I believe I speak for all of us in thanking President Scutter Newton, a human dynamo, for his services. He had a tremendous amount of help from folks like Gary Reeder, Mike Hurdle, Bill Pelley, Frank Hurley and Bob Pfefferkorn, but Scutter was smart enough to know that effective management depends on leading others to help in doing work.

Scutter, we thank you. When you leave New Orleans, please know that your niche in AmSECT’s history is assured, and for the best possible reasons.