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## Message from the Executive Director

Dear potential job applicants (and AFCC members):

Last month, AFCC placed a “help wanted” sign in its metaphorical window (i.e., all over the internet). If you are reading this message, you might be considering applying for what is currently my job: executive director of AFCC. It will be open June 2024. Last spring a search committee was appointed, which engaged a search firm to manage the process. They worked together to assemble [a position description](#). Honestly, it was a bit surreal to read someone else’s account of how I spent nearly three decades (or perhaps it was *how they wish* I had spent that time?). Had the bar been set so high when I applied, I probably would not have been hired. Being the AFCC executive director is great, and I think everyone should want the job. But no position description can do complete justice to the role, so please consider what follows both a supplement and my opportunity to share a few things that I have learned over the years.

### Things you probably cannot change

There are some hard realities that are unlikely to change, so be prepared to live with them:

- Meeting rooms at conference hotels *are* too cold.
- Program evaluations often say, “best session ever” and “worst session ever” about the same program.
- Coffee for conference breaks costs about US \$11 per cup (even more in Canadian and Australian dollars). You can’t do anything about that.
- You cannot implement every good idea or project (or even close) that comes your way.
- It hurts a little bit every time someone you know lets their AFCC membership lapse.
- Some people will not like you. More than a few. But it’s not a popularity contest.
- In an interdisciplinary and international environment, where everyone has different needs and wants, you can’t make all 5,800 members happy.
- You will get a lot of emails. A lot.
- Sometimes it really *has* been done before, and sometimes it really *didn’t* work. More than once. But if you hang around long enough, someone will want you to try it again.
- AFCC members generally don’t care about strategic plans, governance, or organizational policies. Most probably don’t know the name of the AFCC Board President or executive director. They care about high quality, accessible programs, a first-class journal, and an organization that treats its members well. AFCC is all that and more.

## Things you won't want to change

There are some things that you would never want to change. The association's leadership and staff are unparalleled. **The AFCC staff** is the best in the business. There are only six in addition to me: Dawn Holmes, Kelly Bienfang, Patrick Sommer, Abby Rebholz, and Tanya Froh work out of the Madison office. Ann Ordway works from the Phoenix area. Between them, they are responsive, thoughtful, creative, hard-working, efficient, and focused on high performance and the AFCC mission. They exude the best the Midwest (and suburban Phoenix) has to offer. AFCC has a long history of staff continuity, which has been critical to the ongoing success of the association.

As for leadership, I do not know how I came upon the good fortune to work with so many exemplary leaders for such a long time. They are, and have been, collectively without ego, seeking only to improve the AFCC experience in any way possible. They are thought leaders, top practitioners, teachers, researchers, and administrators, who volunteer their time, their service, and think nothing of nighttime or weekend zooms, texts, or calls to brainstorm or problem-solve. Whether setting up a silent auction, bartending in the hospitality suite, mentoring, or training colleagues, or facilitating critical policy discussions, the effort and enthusiasm is the same. AFCC is blessed to have so many leaders who are so willing to do the heavy lifting, both physically and intellectually. I work very closely each year with the president and president elect, and this year Stacey Platt and Michael Saini have embodied everything an association member could want in a leader. There is not space here to list everyone, but the current Board of Directors and former presidents are listed [here](#) and the committee members [here](#).

## The AFCC Community

Finally, and most important, is the ongoing nurturing and appreciation of the AFCC community at large. AFCC has become a highly influential organization, largely because of a community of volunteers at several levels that do the work. For example, a typical annual conference includes an 11-person conference committee, about 18 volunteers, 8-10 dine around leaders, 15 silent auction volunteers, 75 auction donors, 200+ presenters, and local committees of varying sizes. *Family Court Review* editorial staff (themselves paid a nominal stipend) are supported by another cadre of volunteers, including an editorial board of 50+ and law student editorial staff numbering almost 40 at Hofstra Law School, not to mention numerous guest editors and article authors. Dozens of committee and task force members volunteer their time, wisdom, and expertise for free because they are dedicated to AFCC and our **mission, vision, and values**.

At another level, the AFCC community fosters incredible professional collegiality and relationships across disciplines, geography, and experience. The access that newer members have to leaders in the field is extraordinary. I have witnessed, again and again, an experienced practitioner helping a younger colleague with resources, information, and support.

One of my formative AFCC experiences was as a new member in the late 1980s, when I was helping establish a new family court service agency to support Wisconsin's new mandatory mediation law. After meeting several people at an AFCC conference, I was able to go home and pick up the telephone (remember those?) and ask questions of, among others, Hugh McIsaac in Los Angeles, and Linda Hahn, in Dallas, two

experienced family court services directors with a wealth of knowledge to share. Shortly thereafter, I remember spending an hour interviewing Janet Johnston... *Janet Johnston! The Oprah of family law was willing to talk with me!*

The point, of course, is that Hugh, Linda, and Jan were then experienced leaders in the AFCC community and well beyond. I was the director of a tiny little agency located in a courthouse basement office in Janesville, Wisconsin. But they were all gracious, patient, and generous with a young colleague. Years later (*many* years later) Michael Saini shared with me how good it felt when I remembered his name. Today, everyone wants to spend time with Mike, so I guess the beat goes on.

Finally, for some, there are lifelong friendships that are developed in the AFCC community. I connected with a group of people early on. We met at conferences, went out dancing, and more than once knocked on the hospitality suite door after closing time just in case someone inside was still awake. They were not. I won't name names, but my friends became judges, agency directors, pillars of the family court community in their hometowns and well beyond. All of them, except me, became president of AFCC. For decades we have celebrated together, grieved together, watched our respective families grow up, and supported one another in times of need. While all AFCC members do not develop these types of relationships, it is not unusual and many groups establish lifelong relationships. I don't know if that is the norm for professional associations, but it is something that makes AFCC very special.

If you are a potential applicant, I hope these observations have increased your interest in the job. If not, maybe you have more insight into the organization and understand why, after more than 30 years of working for AFCC, I have never for a moment considered other employment. It's been a long time since I have been on the outside looking in on anything of major importance to AFCC, so this is a strange experience for me. I am confident that our team will select an outstanding leader to guide AFCC into the future, and I look forward to supporting them in any way possible.

I am also looking forward to my home stretch with AFCC. I invite you to join us at the [AFCC Annual Conference](#) in Boston next June to welcome our new executive director.

Happy holidays.



Peter Salem