

Experienced Leader

Meet Gail Richard

I had the incredible opportunity and honor to serve as the President of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in 2017. If someone had asked me early in my professional career if I thought I would ever be ASHA President, the answer would have been a resounding and incredulous “no”. There are still days that I feel a bit like an imposter who got away with fooling everyone and am relieved that no one challenged my credentials!

I have always been a goal-driven individual who sets high expectations for myself. After I graduated with my master’s degree, I knew that I wanted to work in the public schools for a while and gain practical experience as a speech-language pathologist, but my ultimate goal was to get a doctorate and have the privilege and challenge of teaching at a university to train future generations of professionals. I wanted my ‘ripple in the pond’ to be broader than just the individual clients I could serve.

When my previous department chair contacted me to offer a faculty position at Eastern Illinois University, I jumped at it! I also quickly became involved in the local and state speech-language-hearing associations. That allowed me to meet and network with other practicing professionals. I have to say that has been, and continues to be, one of the most rewarding aspects of being a volunteer leader. My involvement in the Illinois Speech-Language-Hearing Association began by working on the annual convention and gradually transitioned into chair of committees, Secretary on the Executive Board, and eventually President of the state association. In attending the Council of State Association Presidents (CSAP), my network expanded to a national level. I was elected to serve as a Legislative Councilor for the state of Illinois, and held several leadership positions in that organization, including serving as the first Speaker of the Council, which included a non-voting position on the Executive Board of ASHA. From there I chaired a committee for ASHA and eventually ran for the Board of Directors, first being elected and serving as the Vice President for Speech-Language-Pathology Practice, and then President.

Parallel with my ASHA involvement were many leadership positions at the university. I chaired numerous committees on campus including the Faculty Senate and the University Personnel Committee (which makes all the retention, tenure, and promotion decisions). I was also appointed by the President to serve as the Faculty Athletics Representative for the university, which led to a position on the Management Council of the NCAA. These other leadership activities provided insightful learning experiences to engage in multiple types of leadership experiences.

I also kept my own professional agenda going, with research, publications, and professional presentations. These experiences also continued to build my network of contacts as well as my own competence and confidence in public speaking, listening, and facilitating the work of organizations.

A good leader is multi-faceted and brings many varied experiences to their background!