

H. KEITH HUNT: INCLUSIVENESS AND LEADERSHIP

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In 2000, when I and my corporate team were reorganized to focus away from consumer satisfaction and also had our travel budget eliminated, I feared that I would never again be in contact with all my friends at the JCS/D&CB conferences, and especially with Keith Hunt, its organizer and leader. After all these years, it is a huge pleasure to at least virtually re-connect with my many friends from this discipline and to celebrate Keith's leadership and, yes, his embodiment of this vital and entertaining field.

"Inclusivity" doesn't begin to capture Keith's organization of the CS/D&CB conferences. They were more like gatherings of a family (minus the bickering). And I was worried at my first conference in the early-'90s. I wasn't an academic—I was working for a telecommunications company at the time—and I was a theoretical statistician and not a market researcher. But when Keith later punctuated that first conference with a monologue about the value of corporate and "quant" input, I knew that I had just been inducted as a new family member, and not as a black sheep. This was going to be a safe place to present developing and new research from interesting venues.

Keith's vision of an inclusive, safe venue resulted in a treasure trove of unusual and fun research. A master storyteller, Keith himself was full of interesting and thoughtful examples of customer retaliation (among many others, defacing a restaurant wall after being served a cold burrito). Also, many presenters were encouraged to discuss consumer satisfaction in novel situations: soldiers eating MREs (Teresa Malafi), birding (John Swan), skateboarding (Sally Francis), fit of women's jeans (Marianne Bickle) and prison incarceration (Kent Pinney). My horizons were certainly expanded from these talks.

Yet for all the academic seriousness of these conferences, Keith retained a good amount of humility over the venues. My most salient memories are from the Snowbird, Utah series of conferences. This was a spectacular venue, held in a conference room with a floor-to-vaulted ceiling window on the ski slopes. Keith's remark on this: "Our presenters will think that we are all enraptured by their slides and presentation style (coincidentally shown on a screen in front of said window.) HA!"

I can't think of any other conference whose flyer advertised reluctant audience attention, but Keith pulled it off—that conference was very well-attended. (I think: I was busy looking out of that window too.)

I'll leave it to others to talk about Keith's academic research and influence. What I know is that Keith's conferences were safe, educational and fun, and a—maybe even THE—highlight of my quasi-academic career.