

GIUSEPPE MARLETTA
ASSOCIATION MANAGER
AIJA - INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
YOUNG LAWYERS

I'm no
consultant
- I need *involvement*...

Giuseppe Marletta

- ▶ **SPEAKS** Italian, English, French, Spanish
- ▶ **MARRIED**, two children
- ▶ **PASSIONATE** about good cuisine – has taken advanced cookery courses
- ▶ **LOVES** the cinema - but now has to watch more cartoons than thrillers
- ▶ **ADGRES** travel - with family and friends whenever possible

Motivated to work but tired of consulting, Giuseppe Marletta was looking for a way to channel his passion when he found the young lawyers. Or did they find him? He talks his way round **Rob Spalding** (in one of his four languages)

Rob Spalding: You're managing the young lawyers with no grounding in law then?

Giuseppe Marletta: None at all. I studied Public Relations and Political Science in my native city, Catania, on the east coast of Sicily.

RS: You came to associations quite young?

GM: I've worked for associations, NGOs and international groups since I was 21. I was active mainly in the field of intercultural dialogue and anti-discrimination and organised well over 50 youth exchanges, training courses and seminars for youth workers and teachers.

RS: When you made the pilgrimage to Brussels, it was again to a youth organisation?

GM: That's right. In 2007 I moved to Brussels to work for EPTO as its European Coordinator. The European Peer Training Organization is a very dynamic NGO fighting against all forms of discrimination. It was a sort of continuation of my previous job, but on a different scale.

RS: Then you made a really big change.

GM: I wanted to do more events and work in the corporate world, so I left EPTO to join an AMC based in Brussels where I spent four great years. I was one of the association managers and had clients of all shapes and sizes: lubricants manufacturers, rare disease patients' consortia, regulatory affairs professionals and several others.

I worked on their association management in aspects such as liaising with the leadership, streamlining strategies, managing membership programmes, monitoring budgets and representing them with stakeholders. I organised everything from meetings for 30 people up to congresses for 400.

RS: But then another revelation!

GM: Yes, I found I was growing tired of working as a consultant, so in November 2012, I joined the International Association of Young Lawyers, as Association Manager. Consultancy was not right for me. Some people are brilliant at serving an association on the basis of a budget, time sheets and targets, but not me. I need passion! I need to commit and invest energy in my job! I don't necessarily follow every legal nuance of our events, but I find it infinitely more engaging than lubricants or regulatory affairs!

RS: And what do you do for them?

GM: I work on the strategic management of the association, which means I provide support in terms of leadership, communication, and membership, but I am

the ultimate supervisor of all our events too. And there are 20 a year.

The seminars are mono-thematic, three-day affairs on a specific legal topic of interest to international lawyers. They have between 40 and 150 participants.

The two half-year conferences are for between 150 and 250 delegates. Two parallel sessions are held as well as all the committee meetings and management bodies of the association gatherings. And the annual congress has up to four parallel sessions and typically attracts between 450 and 700 people.

RS: And how are destinations selected?

GM: AIJA is not an association where members just buy services and attend events.

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There are some 200 people who are very committed, who organise events and invest a lot of time in the scientific commissions. And it is they who decide where we go. They submit proposals for our small seminars as well as the big congresses.

AIJA never goes to a destination just because it's fancy or there's strong support from the convention bureau. It's the other way round. If a group of active members wants to host an event, they make an internal proposal and only then do we contact hotels and convention bureaux.

Recently we chose Antwerp in May 2015, Istanbul in November 2015 and London for our Annual Congress in 2015. We would like to go east in the near future and are quite interested in Japan or China.

RS: What do you like about your job?

GM: Every day is different. One moment I am on the line with people organising a congress in Buenos Aires, meeting with the accountant to review the budget the next, then spending an hour with the IT people. It's never boring – always exciting!

RS: You seem to thrive on diversity.

GM: I love it! All association executives deal every single day with delegates to events who expect a response that's appropriate to their own lifestyle and background. I enjoy making adjustments and seeing myself the way they see me. Remember, I spent more than eight years dealing with cultural diversity.

And it's not only managing delegates, it's also about handling the expectations and standards of the different partners or, in the case of AIJA, local organising committee members. A different culture also means different paces, working styles and needs (prior to the event but onsite too).

My experience as a trainer in cultural diversity helps me deal with different circumstances in a sensible way. It's easy to overstep the mark when you're under stress – and we all know how stressful events management can be. Listening to others, managing expectations and focusing on the common objective (the success of your event) have got to be the elements guiding association executives dealing with different cultures.

At the end of the day one of the biggest selling points of international associations is the possibility to network, being a member of a community which extends, geographically and culturally, beyond your usual boundaries. Diversity is in the DNA of associations and only a fool would underestimate its value for the members and enrichment of the association itself. ■