

## **A Great Foundation**

Becoming a SkillsUSA member was a pivotal moment for Dr. Mark L. Johnson, a decision that would forever change the pathways and opportunities that would open to him. Having been involved in student organizations from an early age (4-H, FFA, FBLA, etc) he had taken advantage of many of leadership opportunities. Whether competing in speaking contests, running for district or state office, or getting involved in community projects, Mark thought he had done it all. However, in 1978 when he was competing in an FFA Extemporaneous Speech Contest, one of the judges told him about another student organization that he should consider.

In the Fall of 1979, when Mark enrolled at Labette Community College, Parsons, KS, he signed up for the Industrial Cooperative Education Program offered by Ron Eads, the instructor that had judged him as a junior in high school. Mark was introduced to SkillsUSA (then called VICA) and he quickly got involved. By the end of that first year, he was elected Chapter President, State President, and ultimately, National Post-Secondary Vice President. He also won four gold medals at the State Skills Contest and placed fourth at Nationals in Public Speaking. At age 19, he would serve as one of only 15 SkillsUSA national officers ever to host an International Skills Championships here in the United States, in Atlanta, 1981. During the international conference he got to introduce the International President on stage and feel the effect of 20,000 people jumping to their feet in applause as the president came on stage. As a national officer, he got to meet heads of companies, government leaders, and students from all over the country and world.

## **A New Career Path Opens up!**

Dr. Johnson's planned to earn an Associate's Degree at Labette, get a degree in business at Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, KS, and then enter the world of business. It was

while he was at LCC, he began working for the newspaper in the circulation department and would work his way up to being the circulation manager, supervising 150 employees and managing a budget of nearly three quarters of a million dollars. While working full time, Mark remained an active alumni and would help run the KS state SkillsUSA leadership conferences, training state officers and national officer candidates, and helping with the state contests.

Six years later, he got a call from Dr. Jesse Hudson, then the Chair of the Technical Education Department at PSU to come interview for the position of State SkillsUSA Director. With his encouragement, Mark got an interview and was hired in January 1986. During his tenure as State Director, he increased SkillsUSA membership from 1,706 to nearly 2,500 members. He also helped host the National Skills USA Championships in Wichita, KS in 1987-1988.

### **From SkillsUSA to a Teaching Career**

“The great thing about being State Director at that time”, Dr. Johnson recalls, “is that the office was contracted on the campus of a university. I was responsible for teaching advisor workshops and soon became accustomed to helping instructors across the state improve the way they taught”. Now, more than 30 years later, Dr. Johnson is one of the highest ranking instructors on campus with the title of University Professor. He has been named one of Pittsburg State University’s Outstanding Faculty 3 times and received national recognition as the Association for Career and Technical Education’s National Technical Educator for the Year 2000.

Additionally, by becoming involved in professional organizations such SkillsUSA and ACTE, he became connected with professionals from all over the country. Serving on 5 national Boards of Directors, including SkillsUSA, ACTE, NOCTI, ASTS, and NATIE, he found a

network of opportunities he never knew possible. One connection he made would be the biggest opportunity yet.

### **Teaching Outside the Classroom**

In 2013 a colleague on the National ACTE Trade and Industry Planning Committee, Dr. John Gaal, Director of Training for the St. Louis and Kansas City Carpenter's Regional Council, told Dr. Johnson about a group that he needed to present to. He said "Mark, I have heard your message and I am involved with a group that needs to hear it. It's called the International Foundation for Employee Benefit Plans, and they are holding a conference on Apprenticeship and Employee Training in Palm Springs, CA in January 2014. You should submit a proposal to speak." Mark submitted a proposal and was accepted. His presentation, "Adult Learning Strategies" was viewed by more than 450 Training Trust Fund Managers and trainers from the US and Canada.

At the conclusion of the presentation, several members of the audience approached Dr. Johnson to say thanks for a wonderful presentation. The first 3 people to do so came up to him and said, "We represent the entertainment industry. We want to work with you." Not really knowing what that meant, he soon found out that the three were all representatives from IATSE, the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage and Motion Picture Employees, the folks that make all the movies, TV shows, Broadway Productions, Concerts, behind the scenes. Specifically, the group wanted to invite Dr. Johnson to do a pilot workshop for them to help them improve the way they prepared the more than 160,000 skilled craftsmen in the entertainment industry.

In July of 2014, Dr. Johnson did a two day workshop called “Deliberate and Impactful Training Techniques” for 10 trainers and 10 trustees. The program was so hugely successful, that IATSE contracted Dr. Johnson to begin doing workshops throughout the US and Canada to teach local apprenticeship trainers the keys to better training. Since that pilot workshop, Dr. Johnson has presented more than 25 workshops in more than 20 cities all over North America, from Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal, Canada, to Seattle, San Francisco, Hollywood, Las Vegas, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, and Atlanta. He has trained more than 500 apprenticeship trainers from nearly 100 of the 300 local IATSE unions.

Furthermore, other union organizations across the country are beginning to call on Dr. Johnson for his services. Since 2015, Dr. Johnson has also done teacher prep workshops for the United Alliance, the Plumbers and Pipefitters, the United Painters and Allied Trades, the Hospitality Industry, the Utility Workers of America, and the International Carpenter’s Joint Apprenticeship Training Program. The opportunities keep coming.

### **SkillsUSA was the Vehicle of Growth**

Dr. Mark Johnson sums it all up, “I can easily say that where I am now professionally would never have been possible if it were not for SkillsUSA. It gave me the confidence to believe in my skills and what I have to offer. It gave me the means to become connected to a wide range of people outside my reach. It instilled in me a fervent believe in the need for skilled labor in the world. Through SkillsUSA, I was given a chance to learn the skills that help me really to make my dreams come true.”

Dr. Mark L. Johnson received the SkillsUSA National Honorary Lifetime Award in 1998, as well as the SkillsUSA National Alumni Career Achievement Award that same year, the highest honors that can be bestowed a member. He resides in Pittsburg, KS, with his wife, Jacki.