In a recent Forbes Magazine article, Spider-Man was touted as the quintessential leader. The article listed three valuable lessons about strong leadership that we all can learn from this superhero:

• With great power comes great responsibility.
• Be who you are.
• Do good things even if you don’t get the credit.

Pretty simple, huh? And profound!

Although Spider-Man might not immediately conjure up thoughts of internal auditors and IIA volunteer leadership, they do have quite a bit in common. And to make the case for their similarities, we interviewed 10 exemplary IIA leaders, tapping into their more than 221 years of collective IIA membership.

WHAT’S THE PAYBACK?

Quite often we hear IIA leaders say that they get back much more than they give. Certainly, Spidey would attest to the fact that being a leader has countless benefits. After all, whether you are swinging from one building top to another or heading up a project or committee, it’s pretty cool to know that people look up to you!

One of the great benefits — both personal and professional — of being an IIA volunteer is the growth that comes as a result. “As my IIA chapter’s secretary, I was chosen to attend the 2012 and 2013 IIA Leadership Academies,” says Nateida Lathon, who works at the Social Development Commission in Milwaukee, Wis. “Although I was already involved in the local CAE roundtables because of my job, I am more invested now as an IIA leader — not only in my profession, but as being a face of my chapter. I’ve made strong professional and personal connections with audit peers. This has opened my eyes more to the profession, which in turn has allowed me to add more value to my organization in my role as internal audit director. It also has allowed me the opportunity to mentor my staff, encourage their involvement in the local chapter, and support their growth and professional career goals,” she says.

Deanna Sullivan, who was selected IIA–Dallas Chapter’s “Outstanding New Member” in 1987, has come a long way over the past two-and-a-half decades. This former International Conference chair views relationships among the greatest benefits of IIA leadership. “My dear friend, Aaron Saylor, encouraged my involvement at both local/chapter and international/global levels. He said it was important to give back to the profession to ensure it remains vibrant and growing. Aaron is no longer with us, but his advice is as relevant today as it was then,” attests Sullivan. “Working with The IIA has been incredibly rewarding. I have learned a lot professionally, have made some life-long friends, and have grown to be a better leader though amazing opportunities along the way,” she says.

IIA Executive Committee Larry Harrington agrees with Sullivan. “It is amazing how much I have personally gained from my IIA involvement,” he says. “I have learned the importance of continuously investing in myself, welcoming change as the new norm, significantly refining my communication and influencing...
“Because of my IIA volunteer leadership experience,” adds IIA Board member and Botswana International University of Science and Technology Director of Internal Audit, Lesedi Letsedi, “I have higher confidence, better negotiation capabilities, improved presentation and public speaking skills, and increased professional knowledge.” She goes on to say that she has developed a more in-depth understanding of different traditions and cultures around the world as her global network of professional colleagues has expanded and friendships have evolved. “My IIA volunteer leadership activities have provided intrinsic value that I cannot easily define,” Letsedi says, “and a feeling of self-worth that has enabled me to grow both personally and professionally.”

Carolyn Saint, The IIA’s North American Board Chair who often serves as European Confederation member of The IIA’s Executive Committee, adds, “The IIA volunteer experience, for me, has been invaluable in my position at the largest public transportation authority in the Western Hemisphere — the MTA — where I started as a senior auditor and ascended to CAE, with more than 80 professionals on my staff,” she says.

Poste Italiane Director of Internal Audit Carolyn Dittmeier has been an IIA volunteer since 2001. Currently a member of The IIA’s Executive Committee, she was IIA-Italy’s president from 2004 to 2010, after which she served as European Confederation of Institutes of Internal Auditing (ECIA) chair. “The greatest personal growth I have encountered was successfully activating a concrete transformation of the reputations of IIA-Italy and the ECIA. We increased visibility to stakeholders through new communication channels and strategies,” she explained. “I also had a great time being creative and devising new papers, publications, conferences, and the Corporate Governance Citizen Program in Europe for gaining sponsors and exposure,” says Dittmeier.

The list of benefits goes on, and the positive experiences volunteers share are inspiring. North American Board member Todd Horbasenko defines the value of his IIA leadership involvement as real-life board experience, interpersonal skill development, professional network expansion, professional profile enhancement, and the best way to stay current on the development of the profession. He indicates that his most gratifying IIA leadership effort to date has been the creation of IIACanada as a virtual institute.

“This was my most rewarding effort, and it is a source of great personal pride,” he says. He explains that the ability to enhance and address the unique needs of Canadian members evolved from the creation of the Canadian Council in 2006 (as a subcommittee of the North American Board) to the establishment of an IIA-Canada Board and the Canadian IIA Headquarters in Ottawa. After much consideration, a hybrid governance model — similar to what has been established between IIA North America and IIA Global — is now in place for IIACanada. “This experience has put me in the same room at the same table with such leaders of the profession as the IIA’s president and CEO and other executives at IIAGlobal Headquarters,” he explains. “And all of this began the moment I raised my hand and volunteered to serve on the board of IIA–Edmonton Chapter!” says Horbasenko.

DID SPIIDEY GET IT RIGHT?

I definitely agree with Spider-Man’s lessons learned. Great responsibility comes with being in a position of leadership, and that should not be taken lightly. It requires time, commitment, continuous learning, and the ability to train and mentor others along the way. It’s true that you may not yet get credit or receive accolades for everything you do, but that’s okay, as long as you have passion and conviction, and know that what you are doing is for the greater good.

— Katelyn Lathou, Secretary and Certifications Chair, IIA–Milwaukee

Spider-Man is absolutely right. He believes in servant leadership; that leaders do not exist to be followed, but because they are followed. It is both a great responsibility and a great honor to earn that role. And it’s a role IIA leaders earn every day — Carolyn Saint, North American Board Chair

Spider-Man is right on target! Specific to our profession, I would add several things: candidly and frankly advising management and the audit committee; challenging management in regard to confronting the top risks that could derail the achievement of organizational goals; identifying and recognizing those who can get the job done, while improving quality and maintaining relevance; and developing relationships based on mutual trust and respect. These actions, of course, are displayed by top CAEs. However, those who model the accompanying traits of courage, diligence, discernment, resourcefulness, integrity, and respectfulness not only make the best internal auditors, but also the best volunteer leaders. — Denny Beran, former Global Board Chair and current global board member

I think Spider-Man’s belief in doing good things even if you don’t get the credit is an admirable way of being. Along those lines, I’ve adopted this anonymous quote as my mantra: I shall pass through this world but once. Any good that I can do; any act of kindness I can render; anyone I can inspire, and any activity I can undertake that adds value to life, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I may not pass this way again.

— Lal Baharan, former President of IIA–Toronto and co-founder of the Guyana chapter

If you follow Spider-Man’s excellent advice to be who you are, you will get involved in the right volunteer leadership position at the level that best fits your skill sets. There are numerous committees, activities, and needs within The IIA. Don’t think that your talents and knowledge are of less importance or value than those of the people you see or read about in the internal audit community. Volunteer for things you are passionate about. Be who you are and be involved!

— Deanna Sullivan, former International Conference Chair