

President Kehoe, SECO President Shrewsbury, KOA past presidents, fellow officers, members of the Board of Trustees, KOA staff, my staff and family, and most importantly, my dear colleagues. Thank you so much for allowing me the distinct honor and privilege of serving as the President of this association. I am humbled and grateful for the opportunity to serve you.

Over the past few years, I have heard a particular quotation repeated numerous times. It's a phrase that I first learned in Sunday School. I have heard this saying at three different AOA meetings, on CNN, and as the title of a recent book about crisis in America. In fact, when I Googled the quotation, over half a million choices were available, ranging from books about midlife crisis to various articles about impeaching George W. Bush, global warming and a single payer health care system. The Jewish scholar, Hillel, who lived in the one hundred years Before the Common Era, asked, "If not now, when?" Four very small, yet powerful words. But what is rarely quoted, however, are the two questions that Hillel posed before he asked, "If not now, when?"

When speaking with a colleague recently, he was very surprised to learn that I have been a member of the KOA since 1995, even though I began practicing in Kentucky in 1981. Why? I worked in a community health center until 1983 and then for 2 local surgeons until 1995.

In other words, I was an employed optometrist, just like many of you. I had no responsibilities for running the business. I just did my thing – I took care of patients. I earned a paycheck. Just like many of you. If I couldn't prescribe a particular medication, no problem, the surgeons could do it. Couldn't get on an insurance panel? Well, as an employed optometrist, I didn't even know *what* insurances we took. Wasn't my job to know. I just did what I was trained to do. I saw patients. Then I went home. Just like many of you. Why did I need to be a member of the KOA?

Why? Here's why. Hillel's first question was, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" In the 1980's, I knew exactly who was for me: my employers. They took care of me. They provided patients for me to see, they paid for my license and continuing education, they paid for my health insurance, they gave me a raise every year – and a bonus. "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" But, were they really for *me*? Well, yes and no. They truly treated me well and I learned a lot from them. But who really was for *ME at that time when I was an employed optometrist?* Who had my back? And who has *your* back right now as an employed optometrist?

In 1994, I decided that, at age 39, I had reached my peak in their practice and it was time to venture out on my own. I had very good advisors and a tremendously supportive family. After much hard work, I opened my practice in 1996. Of course, the hard work was *just* beginning. I wasn't an employed optometrist any more. I was an owner.

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” While it may not be so obvious as an employed optometrist, the answer to Hillel's first question is acutely obvious to the OD who signs the checks.

The Kentucky Optometric Association is, by definition, the **ONLY** one “who will be for me”. Both me's. The employed me and the owner me. The KOA works for all optometrists, employees and owners, solo docs and group docs, association members and, yes, even non-members. This association and its staff work for every OD in this commonwealth by protecting our interests and by working for legislation that benefits **EVERY SINGLE OD** in the state. So if the association works for even non-member OD's, then why be a member? Hillel's second question addresses this very issue. Hillel asked, “If I am only for myself, what am I?” “If I am only for myself, what am I?”

A minister went to the home of an angry congregant who had talked of leaving the church. The minister would be among those voting in the

upcoming weeks regarding a new policy that the church's national organization felt was very important. However, the new policy would create major changes, and the congregant felt that the new policy was not needed. In fact, he didn't like it one bit!

The minister was greeted at the door with a silent nod. It was a cold, wintry night, so the congregant had some coals burning in the fireplace. The two men sat down on the couch and watched the hot, glowing coals in silence. After a few minutes, the minister walked to the fireplace. He took the tongs and carefully removed about half of the coals from the pile, isolating each one away from the others. He then sat back down on the couch. Soon, the warmth of the room diminished. The now smaller pile of coals put off less heat and light. More noticeably, the isolated coals lost their glow and went dark. Again, the minister went to the fireplace and this time restacked all of the coals together. He then sat back down. It took very little time for all of the coals to become hot and bright again. The room became comfortably warm. Still in silence, the minister got up from the couch and left. The congregant understood the message. "If I am only for myself, what am I?"

Professionally, we are all responsible for one another. We benefit from the support of one another. If we are only for ourselves, we become those isolated coals in the fireplace. We lose the benefit of community,

of shared experience and of mutual advocacy. We must continue to encourage every optometrist in this commonwealth, employed and self-employed, in solo practice and in group practice to join this association and support its efforts. If the KOA supports every optometrist in Kentucky, then every optometrist should be a member and return that support without hesitation and without reservation.

Hillel's final question, the often quoted, "If not now, when?" is an appropriate closing question. In 1986, the issue was therapeutics. In 1994, it was any willing provider. In 2000, it was children's vision. In 2006 it was equal pay with other providers. Every time Kentucky optometry asked, "If not now, when?" the members of the KOA emphatically answered, NOW!!

According to the "Key Metrics of Optometric Practice" published in 2007, the lowest grossing practices surveyed still generated gross revenues of \$200 per complete exam and \$200 per doctor hour. It takes less than one day per month to fully support the KOA both at the maximum dues level and at the highest level of our political budget. With all that the KOA does for you regarding scope of practice, access to patients and being your advocate in the legislature, how can you not dedicate less than one day per month to the association that is and will be *for* you every single day of every single month? Even if you may not

agree with everything the KOA does, how can you be isolated and be only for yourself? And most importantly, if you won't join the KOA and fully support the KOA's legislative budget now, then when will you?

Of course, in spite of what many people think, the KOA is not all about money. It's about people. It's about all of you. You are the ones who see the patients, who represent our great profession to the community in which you practice. It's the past presidents and current officers and Board of Trustees who provide the leadership to move our association and our profession forward. It's each and every legislative Key Person on the local, state and national levels who develops the relationships that make the KOA the envy of other state associations. It's a great staff in Frankfort that takes care of the business of the association and, through the Kentucky Vision Project, the needs of patients who cannot afford eye care. Each of these makes up that stack of hot coals. We need every OD in the state to be in that stack. It's the best and really the only way to ensure that the light of our profession continues to shine brightly in Kentucky and to provide the heat and energy needed to continue to accomplish great things. Indeed, if not now, when?

I look forward to working with all of you in the coming year to keep our association strong and vibrant. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to do so.