

# NAYGN FOCUS:

## *Firesides with Felix*

January 8th, 2015

The NAYGN President, Felix Meissner, discusses leadership, the future of the nuclear industry, music and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles during a conversation with the members of the Recruiting and Retention Committee.

**[L] This is the NAYGN FOCUS. It is a newsletter that the R&R committee created to highlight some outstanding individuals in our organization. Who better to start this interview series than our current NAYGN president, Felix Meissner. So thank you, Felix, for joining us today.**

**[F]** Can you hear me now?

**[A & L]** Good!

**[F]** All right. Good. I feel like I'm in that Verizon commercial.

**[L] This is Lauren Neuburger. I'm on the line over here at Comanche Peak in Texas.**

**[A] And you know me: Ana Pisani over at Duke Energy.**

**[F]** Thank you, Lauren and Ana, I'm looking forward to this interview. Do I need a safety brief for my pipe and smoking jacket that you asked me to bring?

**[L] I leave that to your management.**

**[A] You can do your own safety moment in your space. Just for formalities, can you give us some background on what you do, both for work and NAYGN?**

**[F]** My name is Felix Meissner. I'm the current President of the North American Young Generation in Nuclear. In my day job I'm a project manager for Westinghouse Electric. I manage all sorts of nuclear components manufacturing projects. Anything ranging from small CRDM replacements to full scale reactor vessel internals manufacturing projects

**[A] And what is your night job?**



**[F]** My night job is catching up on NAYGN things or participate in my hobbies.

**[L] When you were six years old what did you want to be when you grew up?**

**[F]** Oooh! That's a good question. I come from a family of engineers. My dad is a software engineer by education and is now in software management, and my mom is an electrical and biomedical engineer. Both of them went to graduate school in their respective fields, so it was only natural that I went down the engineering path. I went to school for Mechanical Engineering. I loved tinkering with things: taking them apart and putting them back together again. As a typical six-year-old I probably had dreams of being an astronaut or a firefighter or a policeman, but those were all short term and quickly overshadowed by my desire to become an engineer

**[L] Along those same lines, when and why did you first become a member of NAYGN?**

**[F]** I think I joined and I helped out for the same reason many others did: I was asked. During

my new hire on-boarding, I was asked to look into NAYGN and what the organization was all about, and if it was something I agree with, sign up to be a member. I talked to a few folks, read up about it, and figured that's something I wanted to be a member of, so I signed up.

**[A] You've clearly taken several leadership roles in NAYGN. Which one was your favorite, and why?**

**[F]** I love what I'm doing now, being President of NAYGN. I enjoy the challenges, being able to help out our members, the members of our leadership team, and help them succeed in their initiatives. But by far my favorite one, using the perspective of whether or not I would want this to become a full time career, I would want to be the Sponsorship Lead again. A few years ago we kicked off a new Sponsorship initiative where we ask companies for financial support for a full year. It really challenged us to explain to companies the value of NAYGN, and why we're a worthwhile investment. Leading that team for several years made me realize just how valuable and unique our organization is, not just within the industry, but across all industries. When I talk to some of my college friends about the career that they're in, and I talk to them about NAYGN and about what we do, they get all excited and say, 'Why don't we have something

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like that?’ I have a friend that works at GE who builds and designs aircraft engines who’s said he would love to have something like NAYGN, or even something that’s a tenth of what NAYGN; open as an opportunity to me. Long-winded answer, but that’s my favorite.

**[A] We’ve heard the best, so which position do you think was the most challenging leadership position that taught you the most?**

**[F]** That would have to be my current role as President. That’s for a variety of reasons. You’re afforded so many opportunities and it’s difficult to pick just one. The challenge becomes: do you want to focus on driving improvement the infrastructure of the organization, or do you want to pick a new area to expand the organization and your membership



base, or do you want to try to grow historical initiatives or try to expand those? Honing in on those priorities is the challenge, and that’s what taught me the most about my leadership style. It developed me as a leader, which is what NAYGN is all about.

**[L] Speaking of leadership, not all of our**

**NAYGN members are familiar with the Core. Can you tell us about their group dynamic?**

**[F]** When I think of the dynamic of the current Core, three adjectives jump to mind: diverse, adaptive, and supportive. We have a diverse group of leaders in NAYGN based all around the country, though many are in the DC area. But more than half are spread outside of that. And we’re in different industries. We have some folks who work for vendors like myself, we have folks who work for utilities, we have folks who work for industry groups, consulting companies, and we even have one person who’s recently stepped out of the nuclear industry for personal reasons, so we even have that external perspective. As a team we’re adaptable and open to changes, so we’re able to adjust on the fly to overcome challenges and barriers that are put before us. Lastly we’re supportive. One thing everybody on my team does well is help each other out. All of our members help each other accomplish the goals we’re trying to accomplish. That’s a critical area of leadership: being there for the people you’re leading, getting enjoyment out of their success, and helping them reach the goals they have. I think everyone on the leadership team exemplifies that.

**[L] Let me know later if you have any great stories from the Core group.**

**[F]** We’ll save those for the end...

**[A] That sounds like it’s going to be juicy. So, we’ve heard you’re a man of many talents. Someone from your Core told us that you’re fluent in German. How does having that background have an effect on your career and your participation in NAYGN?**

**[F]** For those who don’t know, I am fluent in German. I was born in Germany and am an immigrant to the United States. I moved here when I was nine years old. Knowing another language has directly helped my career: I’ve been assigned to a few projects here at Westinghouse because I was able to provide that bilingual skill. We coordinate between teams in Germany and the US, and even the teams in

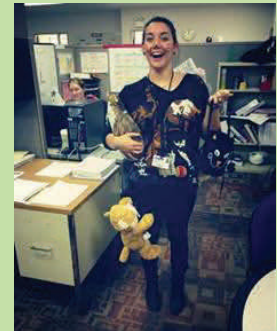
Italy.

**[A] Even teams in Italy? How did that overlap?**

**[F]** I think having that different background and language skill sometimes help me see things from a different angle. There are slight cultural differences between Europe and the US and having the ability to spend time in both countries helps me recognize different views

### Meet the Interviewers!

**Lauren & Ana are members of the 2015 R&R Committee, and met for the first time at the International Youth in Nuclear Congress (IYNC) Conference in Burgos, Spain in July 2014. Since then, they’ve spent many happy hours heckling Felix Meissner and Bobby Ashworth over the phone.**



- Enjoys dressing as a crazy cat lady for work.
- Should have learned Spanish before going to Spain.



- Leaves a trail of rainbow-hued dust in her wake at all times.
- Likes to hover through color runs.

of the world. I would encourage any of our members who are considering taking any foreign or international assignments whether they're short or long term, should get immersed in a different culture and learn a different language.

As far as how that's impacted my work at NAYGN, being able to appreciate different viewpoints of the same situation, has helped me understand some of the challenges that we

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have in the organization. While my language skills haven't directly afforded me the ability to go to international conferences, I was fortunate enough to attend IYNC this last summer in Spain and give a presentation about social media.

**[A] Alright, it's random question time. We're each allowed one. Felix, how clean do you keep your office? Is it tidy or is it messy?**

**[F]** How clean do I keep my office? I have been known to stay late on Fridays to make sure every single piece of paper on my desk is picked up.

**[A&L]** ...What?!

**[F]** Yeah...

**[L]** That is outstanding and surprising.

**[A]** Can you come to my cube and clean it up for me? I've got tons of papers.

**[F, A&L]** [laugh]

**[L]** Ana had her turn, now it's mine. This is

probably my favorite personality question: which of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle do you most relate to, and which is your favorite?

**[F]** [long pause] [awkward laugh] Um, so, uh. You're gonna have to give me a little more of a primer on that one, Lauren. I'm not aware of the uh... ninja teenage mutant turtles. I did not grow up with those characters in my life.

**[L]** Felix... oh my gosh.

**[A]** Okay, I'm gonna say something really quick. I grew up in Venezuela where we had limited access to international programming, and I still know!

**[F]** I grew up in a no TV household ...

**[A]** Oh man. Okay. Got it.

**[L]** Yeah, that'll do it.

**[F]** I have a TV at home, but it's usually used to listen to music through iTunes or Pandora Radio.

**[L]** So you like music. Would you rather spend all day listening to the Rolling Stones or the Beatles?

**[F]** Oooh! That's tough. I'll say neither is my preference, but if I had to choose I would go with the Beatles.

**[L]** What would be your preference?

**[A]** ... Which band would you want to listen to for the rest of your life?

**[F]** You're probably going to hate me for saying this, but U2 is my all-time favorite band.

**[L]** Felix, what are you!? I appreciate your honesty. We need to get some Joshua Tree up in here.

**[A]** Since we had our random moments, let's bring it back to NAYGN. As the President, Felix,

you get the chance to oversee almost everything, so what do you think we're doing well as an organization?

**[F]** I think any discussion of what NAYGN does well or what are we here to do, should start with the discussion of our vision: to develop leaders to energize the future of nuclear. I made sure everyone on my leadership team has that vision memorized to the point they can wake up in the middle of the night and recite it. That's what we're here to do: provide leadership opportunities to our members and allow them to follow through on initiative and goals in a fail safe environment. If you're putting together a professional development event at your company that talks about banking and what type of banking you should have, for instance. If something doesn't go well and you order lunch for the wrong day, that's a pretty low risk of failure there and the consequences aren't as drastic. So we provide those opportunities to our members to learn leadership skills before they have to apply them out in the real world. As a whole, that's what NAYGN does an incredible job executing that vision.

**[L]** So the flip side of that question is, as the President, what do you think NAYGN could do better?

**[F]** I have a very long list of things I see we can improve, but all hammer on the top one. I call it "continuous execution". We tend to have peri-



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ods of high enthusiasm and high energy right after our annual Professional Development conference and then as folks start to go into the fall outage, the enthusiasm and motivation for NAYGN seems to drop off a little bit. It tends to come back in the spring when we're ramping up for our PD conference. We could do better as an entire organization to channel that energy and keeping it alive and kicking throughout the entire year.

**[A] So, if you were able to have a superpower, which one would you pick and why?**

**[F]** A superpower applied to NAYGN or my career or...?

**[L]** To life.

**[F]** It would be that I could fly. Not like a plane, but like a bird. I mean, not like the skill of flying a plane.

**[A]** If you're flying a plane it wouldn't be a superpower.

**[F]** You're right. The why for that is: to me there's always been something magical about the sky and flying. When I see birds I sort of envy them because they can go in six directions: left, right, forwards, backwards, up, and down. We can only go in four: left, right, forwards and backwards. So that would be my preferred superpower.

**[A]** Am I hearing an Icarus complex going on right now?

**[L]** Stay away from the sun, Felix! ... So it sounds like, in every way, you want to see NAYGN and yourself get up off the ground and fly. It's unfortunate, but there have been a lot of rumors that the nuclear industry is going to be slowing the hiring of new graduates. How do you think this is going to affect R&R for NAYGN, and where do you see us going in the next few years?

**[F]** The slowing down of hiring new graduates is an expected trend because the industry really did ramp up hiring five to ten years ago. I think nobody expected those hiring levels to be indefinitely sustainable. Given the market conditions

and the amount of people that have retired out of the nuclear industry, that hasn't come to fruition as planned. You have the two effects: the natural hiring levels were not intended to stay at such a high level and fewer retirees than planned. While it is unfortunate because we're not allowing as many opportunities for folks to enter the wonderful world of the nuclear industry, it shifts our focus from recruiting and puts the spotlight on retention. Our challenge now is not to recruit as many folks as we can into the nuclear industry and NAYGN, but to make sure the people that we do have are happy, engaged, motivated, they get excit-

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ed about the nuclear industry, and that they're passionate for their line of work, company, industry, and nuclear power. I think that's the impact from a strategic point of view, on NAYGN.

**[L]** I think we have time for one more question. Ana, do you have one for him?

**[A]** I was trying to put together a question that would encompass all of Felix. So, in a very personal way, what is your spirit animal?

**[F]** Wow. Not where I thought you were going with that.

**[A]** [laughs]

**[F]** Spirit animal ... I think that's the toughest question of the day today!

**[L]** Saved it for last!

**[F]** Well, I'll give you what I think the spirit animal for NAYGN is.

**[A]** No! You have to give yours too.

**[F]** Well, keeping with our bird theme from the previous discussion, it would have to be an animal that can fly. An animal that's powerful and admired by a lot of people. And an animal that's rare. So not a pigeon, of course.

**[A]** Maybe a pterodactyl?

**[F]** Those are really the qualities embody NAYGN, so I would have to go with a hawk.

**[L]** Does that make you a golden eagle, Felix?

**[F]** Yeah, I would say that then. That's a good choice.

**[L]** Excellent answer. All right, Felix. We have come to the end of our NAYGN Focus on the Core. I want to thank you again for accepting our invitation in the first place, and I personally hope we have a couple of other editions of Firesides with Felix.

**[F]** Lauren, thanks so much for hosting me. I'm looking forward to our next edition of Fireside chats with Felix.

**[A]** Thanks so much and we'll see you guys next time!

**[L]** Bye guys. Have a good one!

**[F]** Thanks, bye!

