

# Convention Speech More Than Talk

By Jane Stegemiller

For those of you who have groaned and yawned your way through more speeches than you care to remember, how about a talk that's not all talk?

**Layne Longfellow**—keynote speaker for the Indiana Hospital Association's annual health congress—spent no time behind a lectern.

But he did play the piano, sing, tell jokes, show slides of antique photographs and play tapes of popular music.

The audience spent no time groaning or yawning—but it did chuckle, sing along and provide a standing ovation at the lecture's end.

Longfellow, 45, Phoenix, is a psychologist who left academia four years ago to found Lecture Theatre, Inc.

He claims his energetic lectures are drawn directly from his own experiences—which explains why the talks are so varied. Longfellow has written scholarly articles and invented games for *Psychology Today* magazine. He has been a rock singer and a college vice president. And he owns 109 acres of wilderness in British Columbia where he spends several weeks each year—without electricity, plumbing or central heat.

## HUMORIST BUT MORE

Longfellow's quips probably are enough to hold his audience.

"A Kansas man said he has proof the continent is on a tilt because all the fruits and nuts have rolled downhill to California," he said. "But I told him about the bumper sticker that says 'Committing suicide in Kansas is redundant.'"

Longfellow is not a stand-up comic. His presentation is devoted to making a point

about the way people conduct themselves. And this time, the point was that America's economy is troubled because we've forgotten what the economy is for.

"The economic difficulties we have been experiencing are a function of the attitude of the work force," he said. "The economic system is supposed to serve the people, not the other way around.

"A major deterrent to productivity in the U.S. today is the feeling that work does not have meaning. If you think nobody cares about your work, then you don't care about it either. And all the efforts to straighten out the economy won't do it until we correct the attitude problem."

Longfellow gave a musical, theatrical history lesson to explain how the American work force has changed.

## DIFFERENT ERAS

"Basically, it's because the people who are in charge grew up in a different era from the people who are working for them," he said. "And the two groups don't understand each other as well as they need to."

"We show our kids what we think is important in the world and prepare them for that. Then, when they come of age, they are prepared to live in a world that ceased to exist 20 years ago."

Longfellow said the people in charge of today's American economy are "Depression babies," people born or young during the Great Depression. On the slide screen appeared a Depression-vintage photo of youngsters diligently shining shoes to earn a few pennies.

"The most important thing to notice in this picture is that these kids are smiling," he said. "And now we Depression babies get

together and say, 'Those were the good ol' days. We weren't afraid of hard work. I got up at 4 a.m. and walked five miles to work 10 hours for a quarter. And I liked it. Those were the days.'

"But the poignancy about these comments is that we've worked hard for years so we'll never have to live that way again. We look back fondly on a period we have vowed never to repeat."

## QUANTITY VS QUALITY

And because the Great Depression hasn't been repeated, Americans have changed, Longfellow said.

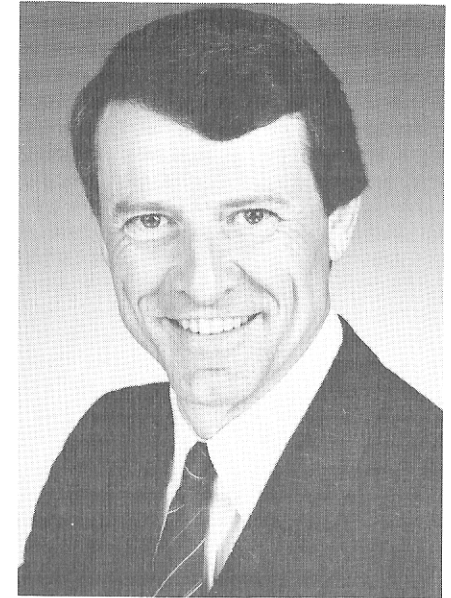
"Kids who grew up in the '60s are the first generation to grow up with the atomic bomb, television and technology. The first generation to grow up in suburbia, in a nuclear family with the father absent. It's the largest generation in the nation's history—and it's the first generation to grow up with great, widespread affluence.

"When this generation came of age, of course there was massive social change." A photo of long-haired, jeans-clad young adults flashed on the screen. "Where did these people come from?" Longfellow asked as he leaped back from the screen with mock fright. "How did they get here and why are they like that?"

"When the Depression-baby parents took care of the quantity questions, the new generation could concentrate on the quality questions and became extremely idealistic."

## WORK AND LEISURE

And the opportunity to concentrate on quality brought disillusionment with em-



phasis on quantity. "Before the '60s, your job was your life, your whole identity. You lived to work," he said. "But for those who grew up with affluence, identity comes from leisure activities and you work to live.

"Give the older group a chance to work overtime and they'll say, 'Oh, yes, yes, please. Never know when I might need some extra money—and besides, what would I do if I weren't at work?' Give the second group a chance to work overtime and they'll say, 'No, thanks—but could I talk to you about a day off?'"

This article includes material from Dr. Longfellow's GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES programs.