



# Speaker's Corner

## ***The Privilege of Being a Distinguished Microwave Lecturer***

■ Simone Bastioli

An iconic sports athlete once said that pressure is a privilege, but, without digging too much into the countless philosophical interpretations of that statement, I would simply like to borrow the same line to express what I have learned during the past three years: being a Distinguished Microwave Lecturer (DML) is a privilege. I do believe *privilege* is the best word to synthesize the emotions I felt every time I stepped on a plane, ready and happy to fulfill my role as an ambassador of the IEEE Microwave Theory and Techniques Society (MTT-S).

Like any important function, being a DML comes with responsibilities, but I can guarantee you that the returns and upsides far outweigh the investment. Had I known three years ago what I know today, I would not have hesitated for a second to step up and nominate myself for the DML program. Unfortunately, a potential nominee does not have this knowledge a priori, and I certainly

### **Editor's Note**

This article showcases the author's experience as an IEEE Microwave Theory and Techniques Society (MTT-S) Distinguished Microwave Lecturer, which is a vital role in the MTT-S.



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In this short article, I review the key aspects of my DML experience and express my point of view, which is that of a relatively young engineer who works in industry while also being active in the MTT-S. My hope is that potential nominees who are evaluating the possibility of becoming DMLs will have a better feeling for what to expect and how to handle the workload associated with the role.

Among the main requirements, the one that concerns most potential nominees is travel, which is directly linked to the number of trips and talks that a DML is expected to complete every year. Taking, as an example, an individual based in the United States (in my case), one can expect to engage yearly in the following tours:

- 1) *Asia (overseas)*: This is a single trip that includes three or four talks in an equivalent number of locations.

know the feeling of wondering about two questions: How will I cope with the traveling? Is this worthwhile for my career? In my specific case, as an MTT-S Young Professional at the time of my application, I also wondered: Am I good enough for this important role?

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These trips take seven to 10 days, depending on how one manages the schedule, which ultimately means 1.5 weeks away from home/work. As a comparison, we can observe that this is only slightly more than the time that would be required to attend a conference overseas.

2) *Europe (overseas)*: This is a single trip with three or four talks in a like number of locations. As the geographical extent of the European continent is significantly smaller than in Asia, these trips may take fewer than 12 days.

3) *North America (local)*: This usually consists of two trips, each including two or three talks in a similar number of locations. These trips can take two to four days, which is easy to schedule, in general, very much like attending a local, short conference.

For a Europe- or Asia-based DML, the same concepts hold true: a European DML simply has to swap the second and third items in the list (with the second becoming the local tour); for an Asian DML, the first and third entries need to be switched (with the first becoming the local tour). Based on these considerations, the expected number of DML talks totals 10–14 each year, which, in terms of trips and the time away from home/work, is equivalent to attending two overseas conferences and two shorter, local ones.

To give a more specific example, during my first year as a DML, I was able to complete the following schedule: an Asian tour (nine days) involving one talk in Hong Kong, China, two talks in Chengdu, China, and two talks, respectively, in Colombo and Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; a European tour (seven days), including one talk in Helsinki, Finland, one talk in Nis, Serbia, and two talks, respectively, in Rome and Perugia, Italy; and, two American tours (three days each), one involving three talks in Florida and Washington, D.C., and the other including two talks in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, respectively.

Any DML nominee working in industry should first seek support from

his or her employer. I was lucky to have a boss who actually advised and encouraged me to pursue the DML role, but I tend to think that the great importance of the DML position should be enough to convince most employers to grant their professionals this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I believe that it is essential for a DML nominee to properly convey the significance of the role to his or her employer, especially if the latter is not familiar with the program and the Society. Another important aspect to consider is that a potential nominee should prioritize DML tours over other professional trips that he or she regularly takes.

In my case, during the year cited in the preceding example, I was unfortunately unable to go to European Microwave Week and a local conference that I usually attend every year. I honestly doubt that those conferences missed my presence; on the other hand, I know for a fact that the Chapters I visited truly benefited from the DML program. Please do not misunderstand my message here; I love our Society conferences and meetings, and the networking provided by these events is unparalleled (this probably represents the main reason that I belong to IEEE and the MTT-S). But, considering my career as a whole, I will have many years and countless chances to engage in these symposia, while the DML opportunity is condensed into a short, eventful window that I could not afford to miss.

In fact, the more I traveled, the more I found I was putting the workload into the right perspective. I started wondering how many times during my career I would travel for weeks to attend conferences and other professional meetings. Most importantly, how many times did (or will) I feel that my contribution to those events was outstanding? The answers to those two questions: lots of times and very few times, respectively. If I apply the same questions to my DML trips, the answers magically switch places. The truth is that, when I traveled as a DML, I had, in a sense, attended a conference where I was the event and where my

contribution was crucial; moreover, the feedback I received around the world has been priceless.

Most of the time those trips ended up being truly refreshing, and they were certainly inspiring from both a professional and a personal point of view. Once the travel workload is put into this perspective, I guess it becomes much more obvious what kind of returns and upsides a DML should expect from his or her trips. With that being said, the question that I would ask a potential nominee is: Would you give up the possibility to experience such an opportunity to save yourself a few journeys around the world (trips that you would probably end up taking for other professional events)?

Potential nominees could also wonder about the organization of the tours, what to expect from their hosts, and how their trip times will be distributed. In my experience, the organization was not complicated. Depending on your location, you probably need to do some homework simulating different flight schedules to get to various destinations in an efficient manner before finalizing a tour. For example, during my second year, for the Asia tour, I served Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Taipei, Taiwan; and Kyoto, Japan; I followed this order because the flight schedules made a lot of sense (all my flights were direct). At times, finding flights for some legs may be problematic, but a simple solution might be to serve an extra Chapter whose location is geographically/logistically convenient.

As an example, during my first year, for the Asia tour, I had problems finding flights to Colombo and Chengdu from my home location; but, interestingly enough, Hong Kong made a convenient hub for the first leg of the journey. Once I realized that, I contacted the Hong Kong Chapter chair and added a speaking engagement. The takeaway from my experience and the most important suggestion that I can give to a new DML is to make a detailed study of flight schedules before finalizing locations

and their order, as this will make the whole travel experience feasible and significantly more comfortable. All the Chapters I served were very helpful for finding local accommodation and transportation. In fact, they all have been incredibly available and kind. Their contribution is essential, especially when language barriers might be an obstacle, and my suggestion is not to be afraid to ask because Chapters are there to assist DMLs (and are happy to do so).

The audience you will serve is very heterogeneous. You may visit institutions that are deeply involved with the subject matter of your talk, and you may find yourself speaking to audiences that possess only the basics, but I found both cases to be stimulating. Besides your talk, it is not uncommon for Chapters to organize workshops and meetings with their students and even to arrange multispeaker events, where your presentation will be supported by local professors and experts. I felt these aspects were quite enriching to the overall DML experience, as I was not expecting to encounter them when I started.

I was certainly not aware of how happy and grateful the Chapters are to host DMLs; once I realized this, I officially became a true MTT-S ambassador (well beyond the formality of the role). Any potential nominee should be aware that the DML program is

by far the most important service the Society provides its Chapters around the world (I had always heard this but never fully understood it beforehand) and that, as a DML, you will become the medium through which this benefit is conveyed.

Is there any time for casual sightseeing? The answer is: plenty. Although I was traveling all the time on a tight schedule (presentations and travel every other day, spending two nights in each location), I found that at least 70% of my time was actually available for sightseeing (sometimes even more). On some occasions, just the trip itself can become an unforgettable experience, such as the ride from Colombo to Kandy in Sri Lanka, where the landscapes I saw were absolutely fantastic. Here is another example, this time from my experience in Kyoto: the afternoon after my arrival, I visited a couple of local temples, and, during the evening, I toured some of the characteristic neighborhoods of the city (where I had a delicious, yet very expensive, Kobe steak). The next morning (before my talk, which was scheduled for 1 p.m.), I visited the Fushimi Inari Taisha shrine, walking for three hours up and down the iconic *torii* paths [Figure 1(a)].

After the talk, the local hosts were kind enough to invite me for additional sightseeing as well as another very typical Japanese dinner. The next

day, before my flight, I ended up simply waiting because I had honestly run out of close-by locations to visit. I could share another dozen examples of my sightseeing as well as little gems of local knowledge I acquired. For example, I did not know that the hippopotamus is the world's most dangerous animal, that a country can speak 11 languages, and that I could find fantastic wine and farm products in South Africa (where I traveled during my third year). I would never have imagined that Taiwan has been the home of the best single-malt whiskey in the world; I was even more surprised to enter the Radar Innovation Labs at Oklahoma State University to find a gigantic Smith chart embedded in the lobby floor. I could go on forever, but it is time to wrap this up.

I can safely state that serving as a DML has truly been the best thing I could have done for my career. Once the returns and upsides are considered, the required workload becomes rather marginal. I have engaged in much more demanding professional activities that did not yield the same returns (not even close). As a DML, my international visibility increased tremendously. I would have needed decades of hard work to gain the recognition I received during the past 36 months. I had the pleasure to be invited as a keynote speaker at some very big events whose local



**Figure 1.** Scenes from the author's DML tour in Japan. (a) A torii path at the Fushimi Inari Taisha shrine. (b) Delivering a talk at Ryukoku University's Seta campus. (c) Visiting the Nishi Hongan-ji temple with local MTT-S members: (from left) Prof. Tetsuya Ueda, the author, Prof. Atsushi Sanada, and Prof. Toshio Ishizaki.



**Figure 2.** The author delivers a keynote presentation at ICMMT 2018 during China Microwave Week.

coordinators probably had not known my name three years earlier. As an example, I was asked (along with two other DMLs) to serve as a keynote speaker at the International Conference on Microwave and Millimeter-Wave Technology (ICMMT) during China Microwave Week (Figure 2). I found myself speaking in front of 1,200 people (I honestly was unable to see the back rows of the audience).

Aside from my personal reputation, which increased within the Society, it has been a true educational and

eye-opening experience, as I have been exposed to numerous research activities around the world. Visiting universities, getting a feel for the complexity of various laboratories, and seeing how certain locations can produce excellent results in spite of modest equipment are priceless upsides that an industry professional like myself would have inevitably missed. On a personal level, I also got the chance to meet numerous professionals in our field, some of whom I can call friends today.

If I were asked, “Would you like to do another three-year term?” my answer would certainly be yes, without a shadow of a doubt. I am going to miss not being an active DML (I am gaining emeritus status which, at 39 years old, sounds funny and flattering at the same time), but the rules are the rules, terms are made to begin and end, and the time has come for me to pass the torch to the next candidate. Did I say torch? Sorry, I meant privilege.



## President’s Column *(continued from page 8)*



**Figure 1.** MTT-S President Elect Rashaunda Henderson is an associate professor at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Let me introduce the other members of our MTT-S leadership team, the 2021 MTT-S AdCom officers. Our 2021 president elect and budget committee chair is Rashaunda Henderson (Figure 1), who joined the AdCom as secretary in 2015. She has been chair of the Education Committee and held



**Figure 2.** MTT-S Treasurer Maurizio Bozzi is a professor at the University of Pavia, Italy.

a variety of other AdCom positions, including assistant treasurer.

Our 2021 treasurer is Maurizio Bozzi (Figure 2), who joined the AdCom as secretary in 2016. He was chair of the Meetings and Symposia Committee prior to becoming MTT-S treasurer in 2020.



**Figure 3.** MTT-S Secretary Joseph Bardin is a professor at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst and a member of the Google Artificial Intelligence Quantum Team, Santa Barbara, California.

Joseph Bardin (Figure 3) is joining the AdCom as our 2021 secretary. He was one of our 2020 MTT-S Outstanding Young Engineer Award winners. Congrats, Joe!

I encourage you to visit our website (<https://www.mtt.org>) for more information about the MTT-S and volunteer opportunities.

