



FSAE Foundation Think Tank White Paper, September 14-16, 2010

Don CeSar Beach Resort, St. Pete Beach, FL

“The Leadership Renaissance for Today’s Executive Renewal for You and Your Organization”

Introduction

Now, more than at any time in recent decades, association executives are facing an array of unprecedented challenges. A troubled global economy, emerging technologies with far reaching implications, and rapidly developing social and professional trends provide a stage for either the weakening or the revitalization of the association industry and the individuals who serve it. This increasingly demanding environment scrutinizes each association’s relevance and exposes effectiveness, often taking a toll on staff members and volunteer leaders laboring to meet the complex needs of their members.

Association leaders now recognize that it is time to update their understanding of what members need and want, to discover new ways of tapping into the resources available to them, and to rethink their approach to carrying out their mission. At a very human level, there is renewed awareness that the mental and physical well being of everyone in an organization must be a priority in order for it to thrive.

Without question, managing an organization during uncertain times can physically and emotionally fatigue an association executive, and take a toll on the spirit of even the most resilient among us. But, there are amazing resources within every person, and they can be rediscovered and refreshed regardless of how long one has served in a management role. New ideas and perspectives are the keys to renewal for leaders and for associations.

The personal and professional transformation (fundamental change) being sought requires that those directly involved be equipped with the very perspectives, skill sets, and strategies known to initiate change and sustain a vibrant culture. Using insight, imagination, experience, and new information, an association executive can experience transformative growth at any stage in his or her life, and powerfully influence others in ways that will revitalize staff, volunteer leaders, and the culture of their organization.

We started our conversations with the assumption that, regardless of how long a staff executive had served the organization, it was important to examine how they can **accelerate** their emotional engines and refresh perspectives. Managing in uncertain times challenges passion for the job and takes a toll on the spirit. We focused on personal and professional transformation to explore how leadership renewal could transfer into revitalizing an organization.

Keeping the above focus in mind, the following is a synthesis of the ideas addressed during the 2010 FSAE Think Tank sessions. Some of the concepts were formally presented while others were generated through group discussion. It should be noted that even though the majority of the concepts chosen for presentation were addressed during one or more sessions, those ideas and strategies that were not fully explored due to time constraints or group preferences, are also included in this document.

The Art and Science of Change

Discussion

Change is occurring all around us every day. It is unfolding more rapidly than ever before, and it impacts us both personally and professionally. Of course, we are not only the audience for change; we are in many cases the architects of it. Essentially every activity we undertake is related to bringing about some type of new reality. Our goals and motivations reflect a strong desire for change, and yet the very idea of change can bring out our fears, threatening our sense of stability or even our self-esteem. For some, the need for change suggests that something must be wrong, and that allowing it to occur would be like admitting failure or guilt. However, we must realize that just as ships at sea must make constant course corrections due to the ever-evolving environment, association executives must respond as well.

In some cases the changes are on a more personal level. What do we believe about ourselves and about others? Are these beliefs helping or hurting us? Without a healthy self-image, we may lack the confidence to take the steps required for success of any kind.

An association workload that continually taxes human and financial resources can easily cause emotional and physical strain resulting in burnout, a common term used to describe the effects of being overworked. If allowed to go unchecked, it robs people of their true ability and their enthusiasm. An even more disturbing phenomenon is known as rust-out. Rust-out is what happens when we stop growing because we have stopped taking on new challenges. Our unwillingness to take a risk and the almost stifling need for security, removes us from who we were meant to be. In some cases these people will “quit and stay” further detracting from the overall effectiveness of the organization as a whole. While burnout is related to over-doing, rustout is related to under-being. We must challenge our own beliefs and reclaim our identity. No course of action, personal or professional, can be maintained until our most fundamental needs are met.

Recommendations to association leaders from Think Tank Participants

1. Consider that, if you are not perfect, your self-doubts aren't either. Do not simply accept your perceptions of what is “wrong with you” as necessarily correct. Get help from your trusted advisors, and reframe the way you see yourself. We all need to improve in some areas, but it is a relief to find that some of our beliefs are simply not accurate.
2. Schedule time for yourself to refuel. Your mind and your body can only give 100% of what is available. Do not feel guilty about refueling. It is not wasted time.
3. Put yourself and those you care about most on your schedule. The most important things in life should be secondary to what you put on your to-do list.
4. Ask yourself periodically if you are doing pressing things that are not important, or important things that are not pressing. We cannot shirk our responsibilities, but sometimes we need to think and act on a higher level.
5. Challenge your comfort zone. It can be calming to pay more attention to the things that have not changed. They are often the most important, and taking note of them gives us a better sense of stability and helps us determine how we should use our energy.
6. Consider whose permission you need to change. You must first give yourself permission.
7. Everyone needs a support group. IAMFSAE can be an effective way to tap into valuable resources.
8. Learn to meditate.
9. Consider physical activity; exercise can relieve stress.

Inventory and Maximize Your Resources: How the Mind Works

Discussion

We often focus on our weaknesses more than we capitalize on our strengths. Our problem is not that we don't know what to, but rather that we don't do what we know. The opportunities that we miss, and the problems that we unwittingly allow to persist, are usually more expensive than the solutions.

We are all so busy using our minds that we may not stop to consider how our minds actually work. A better understanding enables us to tap into our internal resources, operate more efficiently and effectively, and experience less

stress. Thanks largely to research conducted by Kolbe Corp, Phoenix, Arizona, over the past thirty-five years; we know that there are three parts to the mind. The Cognitive (thinking) part, the Affective (feeling) part, and the Conative (doing) part. All three parts of the mind determine our actions. This understanding of the mind is the basis for maximizing individual and team efforts in a wide range of well-known companies and educational institutions.

Asking questions is part of the thinking process. The questions we ask are tied to our training and our beliefs. When we find ourselves in a rut, it is often due to an unending process of searching for the answers, when what we may need to do is to look for new questions. There are three possible responses to new information. We can ignore it, we can rearrange it so it fits our existing understanding and beliefs, or we can give it serious consideration and adapt to our needs. Surrounding ourselves with people from a variety of backgrounds and with different kinds of expertise is one of the best ways to ensure that valuable information is recognized and fully considered.

Feelings (emotions) are an involuntary response to what is happening around us. Feelings are central to building a healthy culture and they are what primarily define a quality life for each individual. Positive emotions can be intentionally triggered, and will provide each person with more mental and physical energy.

Doing (instinct) refers to a person's natural best way of producing results. Thinking and feeling, greatly influence what we do, but the *Striving Instincts* (innate behaviors – not learned) determine essentially *how* we will take action. There is an online process at www.kolbe.com which analyzes an individual's unique instincts and provides a report which details how one can be more productive and experience less stress. You are also welcome to contact Rod McIntyre, Rmcintyre@kansasrealtor.com, for additional information.

Recommendations to association leaders from Think Tank Participants

1. Weaknesses should be managed and minimized, but we must focus on our strengths. It is helpful to routinely make a list of individual and group strengths and assess how effectively these strengths are being utilized.
2. The toughness required to cope with a problem may be greater than the toughness required in solving the problem. Make a list of some key times when you have triumphed over hardships. This is real proof of what you can do.
3. Do your best when you are at your best. If you are at your best in the morning, that is when you should do the things at which you are the best. Give your strengths an opportunity to produce results.
4. To overcome ruts, we need new questions. New questions come from the books we read and the people with whom we interact. We must systematically seek input from our staff and our members as they have different backgrounds, perspectives, and expertise.
5. It is wise to utilize outside experts (consultants) when possible. Just two or three new ideas or perspectives can be very powerful.
6. Triggering positive emotions can be as simple as listening to music on the way to the office that puts us in a good mood.
7. We can change how we feel about something by associating something else with it. Anthony Robbins' *Personal Power* system is one of the resources available to learn how to do this effectively.
8. Having each staff person and possibly volunteer leaders complete the Kolbe-A Index will reveal their natural best way to achieve, and will also help them reduce stress.

Goal Setting and Transformation

Discussion

Our goals are powerful and important. They represent what inspires us and they embody the best we have to offer. However, harnessing that inspiration and actually achieving those goals can prove to be very elusive without a system that is compatible with human nature and the demands of day-to-day living. The Reticular Activating System in our brains tells us what is important and it searches for information that will help us achieve our goals, but we can make this process much more focused and effective by writing down and reviewing our goals regularly.

Goal setting is essential throughout our personal and professional lives. It is imperative that we each adopt (or design) a system that works well for us. Goals are not mere wishes; they are key landmarks on a roadmap to our fulfillment. In all

times, and particularly when we are at a critical crossroad, written goals that are reviewed often (at least two or three times a week) give us a real sense of stability and order. They are part of our belief system, and they help to define who we are, where we are, and where we are going. Goal setting helps us access our resources, and it can play an important role in reducing stress by keeping us focused.

Recommendations to association leaders from Think Tank Participants

1. Never work on more than two major goals at one time. These goals take a great deal of energy and focus, and adding more make it impossible to accomplish any of them. Write them down and be specific about the desired outcomes.
2. Create leverage by writing down four benefits you will enjoy if you accomplish your goal, and then write down four prices you will pay if you do not accomplish it.
3. Identify up to three goals that you would like to achieve that will require only a change of habit, rather than a major energy investment. These are goals that will reduce your stress and improve the quality of your life over time, such as improving your diet or going for a walk every evening.
4. Link enjoyable things such as music to tasks in order to change how you feel about doing them.
5. It is absolutely essential that you write your goals down and keep a journal of what is working, observations you have made about yourself and the world, etc. Review and revise your goals regularly. When you are regularly interacting with your goals, your goals can be realized. This also gives you a more focused idea of what you are trying to accomplish. Your Reticular Activating System will constantly search for information around you that will help you achieve your goals.
6. Make sure you have a support group around you. Join IAMFSAE, a great resource for everyone.

Transformational Leadership

Discussion

Transformational leadership is a type of leadership intended to bring about positive changes in groups and individuals. It is visionary leadership wherein the process is as important as the organization's objectives. People are empowered to use their expertise and talents to the fullest with a clear view of the big picture, rather than merely working with a list of isolated tasks. The central idea is to create a truly great association culture. This is made possible by passion, by hope, and by appreciation and respect for people and their differences. It embraces new ideas and taps into the collective experience. The great association culture fosters a real desire for participation and assembly, and through mutual trust and effective communication, the leaders feel connected to the membership.

Transformational leadership, in its many forms, requires association leaders to gain a better understanding of their members' needs. It is only with this understanding that leaders can continue to develop an organization that is relevant. This of course includes gaining a thorough grasp of the business needs and realities of their members, and ensuring that all staff members are also educated in this area.

Ultimately, transformational leadership can thrive only when those who carry out the mission are not striving at a level that is excessively taxing. Leaders must have the managerial courage to determine reasonable boundaries and expectations, and even though it is very important to establish and maintain good relationships with staff, volunteer leaders, and the membership, it is also important to keep in mind that executive level decisions must be made with the understanding that being respected is more critical than being liked. The right thing to do is the right thing to do, regardless of the potential repercussions.

Recommendations to association leaders from Think Tank Participants

1. Show members that you respect and value them by really listening to what they have to say.
2. Move beyond job titles and inventory the talents and training available to you. Consider pairing people up on projects that would benefit from their combined strengths.

3. Associate! Consider scheduling time to go out and meet with some of your members at their offices to build relationships, gain a better grasp of their needs, and jointly envision possibilities.
4. Make sure you have representation from all age groups when determining goals and objectives.
5. Staff members can help identify future volunteer leaders. This helps to avoid the “spin cycle” effect in leadership with the same people rotating from position to position.
6. Get leadership involved in communication with members. Ask your leaders to make two calls to members, asking them what is going on in their respective associations, and then telling them what is going on in the association.
7. Teach your leaders to network on behalf of the association. Provide public relations training so they can effectively “work the room.”
8. Set boundaries for yourself and staff. Don’t respond to e-mail as soon as you get it. This sets people’s expectations for instant responses.
9. Don’t have staff e-mail you throughout the day. Create time to meet.
10. Re-energize at the end of each day. Ask yourself to list the things you did well that day.
11. Don’t fear that someone will discover that you don’t know something.

Culture, Change, and Resource Activation

When we recite the *Pledge of Allegiance* or sing the *National Anthem*, we do so not only to demonstrate respect, but also to remember who we are and what we stand for. It is important for an association to have a strong identity and for its members to know what the core beliefs are. While associations typically have mission statements, they also need to have value statements that build on the core beliefs and articulate specifically why someone should belong, i.e., what they will receive for their dues. Vibrant associations strive to ensure that they are relevant. They strive to meet the needs of all members, recognizing and accommodating differences among their members, but focusing on what their members have in common.

Differing opinions among members is not the primary challenge. Ignorance is. Association programs cannot serve the members if the members are somehow unaware of them or do not understand them. While the most active members have traditionally given life to the valuable programs and services provided by associations, their resources have diminished and broader participation is needed for success of fee-based programs. Supplemental association income may be required as well. In the new reality of the world economy, dues dollars are not enough to maintain even the long standing programs and many associations are looking for ways to generate non-dues revenue to avoid or reduce program cuts. Most members understand the possible need for the reduction of programs and services, but ironically, this is the time when they need their association perhaps more than ever before.

Recommendations to association leaders from Think Tank Participants

1. When proposing a significant change, state first what will not change. People do not fear change as much as they fear loss.
2. When trying to create a “buzz” about a new program or service, leak the information to a few key people to test the reaction informally.
3. Consider comparing levels of association involvement with success in the industry. This could provide some very compelling evidence about the business value of association involvement.
4. Use technology to create a stronger by sending pictures of your leaders at association events to them to let them know you are thinking about them.
5. Bring past presidents into the room and invite them on stage to pass the gavel down from past leaders to the new leaders during installation/inaugural events.
6. Consider alternative governance models, such as establishing a board of governors rather than relying on a committee structure.
7. Non-dues revenue can be generated through expanding you market share by serving more people through increasing membership or by providing more fee-based services to non-members.
8. Online training can be an opportunity for increasing non-dues revenue and will allow you to reach people who may not be able to attend your annual conference or education events.
9. Send information to non-members about programs and services, but don’t disenfranchise them by saying that they are not members. Simply state what the fee will be for them.
10. Look at expanding your market to offer products and services in different languages.

11. What suppliers do your board and members use? Leverage your membership to get new suppliers and vendors to work with the association.
12. Ask your leadership to go back to their payables to determine who they are using for products and services to create a prospect list.
13. Stay in touch with your sponsors year round. Constantly demonstrate that you have value for them. You must have a touch point program. Communicate with them 80% of the time and only ask for money 20% of the time.
14. Have your sponsors introduce the speakers at meetings
15. Send thank-you notes (hand-written) to all your sponsors.
16. We need to woo our members as much or more than we woo our non-members.
17. Consider invitations instead of marketing pieces for certain events.
18. Have board members in the region contact members and personally invite them to attend an upcoming event.

Group Process

One of the key skill sets for any leader is the ability to manage the group process, especially when trying to reinvigorate an organization. Group decision-making and group project completion involve subtleties that many of us do not grasp. Unlike some other countries whose schools promote and require a substantial amount of group work, the United States focuses more attention on how to work independently. For this and other reasons, our members may not be well versed in the art of group work. A great deal of emotional intelligence is needed to make people feel genuinely valued, respected, and heard. Beyond the basics of being well organized and having a clear picture of committee or task force objective, there are intellectual, emotional, and instinctive issues that must be factored in.

Recommendations to association leaders from Think Tank Participants

1. Take the time required to consider the training and natural talents of the participants. People get frustrated and groups stall when people are not allowed to use their strengths.
2. No one should ever leave a meeting with less dignity than they had upon arriving. After a spirited debate, go around the table after things have calmed down and invite each person to make closing comments. If you set the right tone and expectation for this, they will summarize their points and apologize for anything that sounded unfriendly. The leader can then validate the participants' input and the meeting can move on or conclude without people wishing they could have "set the record straight."
3. The leader should share the decision formula (the series of conclusions) that brought them to their final conclusion on a given topic. This is much like what an attorney does with a jury when he/she presents the step-by-step reasoning that supports their position. By walking everyone through the reasoning, it is much easier to eventually reach a consensus, and it also allows members of the group to question specific conclusions within the formula. The resulting transparency leads to better decisions through group participation.

Communication

In surveys where people are asked to rank the factors that have the greatest impact on the success of an organization, communication is almost one of the top two, and is frequently number one. The author, Tony Jeary, once said, "You can't change someone's mind. You can only change the content *of* their mind." Without question, if we are to equip our members with information that allows them to make good decisions, we must communicate ideas clearly and in a manner that encourages people to carefully consider that they have heard. However, communication must flow in both directions. Do we put more emphasis on informing our members than we do on asking for their opinions? It is important to get out and *associate* with our members. By asking our members for their ideas and suggestions, we are tapping into a valuable resource, and we build relationships with a broader group than that which is represented as association events. Social media offers a very effective way to have more frequent, lower cost contact with members, and it is particularly effective when it is supported by face-to-face or at least voice contact to the extent that it is possible.

Another factor that has significant, positive impact on an organization is a charismatic leader. For executives to serve in this role long term, the need for nourishing their renewal is critical. Their internal and external dialogues must be positive and supportive, with meaningful feedback from respected colleagues.

Recommendations to association leaders from Think Tank Participants

1. Stay in touch with your members. A popular business philosophy in Real Estate called *Ninja Selling* is based in part on the concept of *staying in the flow* with people. This cannot be done through infrequent or meaningless contact. Ask F.O.R.D. questions when you talk to your members. Talk about family or friends, occupation, recreation, or dreams. This promotes valuable discussion and builds strong relationships. Always make sure you call with something of value to them.
2. When sending out longer e-mails or letters, present the information in two levels. List three or four brief bullet points at the top and word them in a way that really catches people's attention. Below that, restate each bullet point again, but support it with the details. This meets the instinctive needs of all of your members. Some want the details and some just want the bottom line. Even if some of your members only read the bullet points, that is far better than not reading anything and then missing important information.
3. Make sure that everyone on your staff has three talking points at every major association event. This is a powerful way to let your members know what is happening in their association. It is also helpful to provide training on how to work a room effectively and how to ask valuable questions.
4. Phone calls from members can consume a lot of time, and we sometimes view them as an interruption to what we are doing. We all need to remember that a phone call from a member might be their only live contact with the association for the entire year. Member phone calls provide a great opportunity for us to connect with people and to ask them how things are going for them and what the association can do to help.
5. Technology is a wonderful tool. Used improperly it creates problems that are the fault of the user, not the technology. We can use technology to strengthen and maintain relationships and to keep our members informed. We must remember that technology does not entirely replace a handshake or a phone call, and that blanketing members with an endless barrage of e-mails can easily cause them to ignore what we are sending.
6. Use "round" words and phrases, not square ones. A basic understanding of diplomacy and emotional intelligence reveals that tension can be avoided or at least reduced when we phrase our comments in a way that is not absolute or judgmental. "You're wrong about that," is a square phrase. "I have to tell you, that hasn't been true in my experience, but maybe it has been different for you," is a round phrase.

Summary

We recognized that achieving personal renewal was not likely to occur in a two-day session. Our goal was to take a collective breath and focus on where we were versus where we wanted to be, personally and professionally. Not surprisingly, the participants offered a wealth of very useful information. Many shared not only solutions, but also a valuable glimpse of the realities they have been facing in different aspects of their personal and professional lives. The 2010 Think Tank refreshed not only the participants' views of how they might approach their individual challenges, but also their already strong connection with other FSAE members, demonstrating the collective power of genuinely trusted colleagues.

Think Tank participants contributed inspirational and motivational items to a Wisdom Book that can be found at www.fsaefoundation.org.

About the Facilitator

Following a fifteen-year career as a public school and university teacher and coach, Dr. Rod McIntyre, the 2010 Think Tank Facilitator, accepted a position with the Kansas Association of REALTORS® in 1998, and is currently the Vice-President of Program Development. He is also a partner in FULL VOICE, a Kansas City-based company specializing in communication and leadership skills for business professionals. Rod is a Kolbe Certified Specialist with expertise in helping individuals and groups achieve their goals through maximizing their strengths. He can be reached at Rmcintyre@kansasrealtor.com, or at 785-231-9661.