

Visualizing the future and anticipating the decisive moment

Leadership lessons learned By Rhea Blanken

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Today's professional association staff is pressed both to manage and to lead in new ways distinct from times past. They quickly must adjust plans to align with environmental and economical changes to deliver better value than ever before, while producing tomorrow's promised offerings on time.

That's why, for the past year, this series has endeavored to highlight ideas from outside traditional association procedures and processes that could provide opportunities for new thinking from association staff and new opportunities for action from volunteer leaders. The good news is there are daily opportunities to accumulate the information, knowledge and understanding necessary to achieve what is expected in the present while moving into a new future.

In previous *TRENDS* articles, I have presented recognizable situations – sports, chocolate, jazz, Lewis & Clark, Captain Picard and Queen Elizabeth I – and identified how the distinctions presented, if used, could support staff and volunteer leaders to formulate new, creative ways of thinking and to be seen as new opportunities for action.

Examples abound to extend leadership's future roles

In *Fast Company's* September 2006 issue, "*This Year's Winners of Our Customer First Awards*" rates organizations that create an immersive environment; promote employees as experts; have customers getting smarter by being customers; reinvent markets; and use technology that enhances the experience. All these qualities also apply to the best seen in assn management and leadership today.

Then there's the cover story of the April 24, 2006 *BusinessWeek* on "*The World's Most Innovative Companies.*" It speaks to valuing a culture that puts innovation at the top; measures matter; goes outside for key ideas; practices risk tolerance; encourages courage; coordinates and collaborates a critical component; includes thinking "not like ours"; and keeps oral traditions alive by telling and retelling stories of innovation and transformation. Associations could certainly learn a few lessons here.

Even more to learn from an artist's image

Now let's apply Ansel Adams's pre-visualization philosophy for creating an image and see what leadership understanding can be gained. By inventing new rules of photography, Ansel Adams mastered the science and then employed art. He "pre-visualized" the finished image. He invented the art of pre-visualization and made art from its practice.

Adams would visualize in his mind's eye what he wanted the viewer to see in the finished print. Then using the subtleties of light and shadow, knowing what he needed to correct for in the darkroom, and, by changing how he developed the image, Adams would create an image that had the viewer see what he wanted them to see. He said:

– "There is nothing worse than the sharp image of a "fuzzy" concept."

– "It is essential that the artist trust the mechanisms of both intellect and creative vision."

– "Recognition and visualization are often blended in a single moment of awareness...I recognize the potential for using an unconventional process and I visualized the outcome much as it appears...with practice, the image is visualized in considerable detail."

Consider the possibilities

CEOs and their staffers need to pre-visualize the future much as Adams did his photography, by saying what's possible and inspiring others to achieve the vision. Images, visual and spoken, influence others to act. If staff and volunteer see a new world in their thinking, and then communicate that new world to others, by employing aligned and correlated actions, they can bring that envisioned future into being. Assns are portals into the future and if their staff and volunteers use their opportunities well, they can create what others will see and live into.

When ideas are left to casually germinate, they often remain incomplete. Discipline and attention are required in evolving these ideas into fully formed plans and actions. Pre-visualizing their outcomes creates dynamic opportunities to better refine, alter, expand and increase their impact. Trouble can occur when an idea gains momentum before outcomes are clearly visualized.

Which elements of “This Year’s Winners of Our Customer First Awards” or “The World’s Most Innovative Companies” will you and your staff employ to pre-visualize your assn’s future? How will you introduce them for maximum influence and impact to your volunteer leaders so they too can pre-visualize the future? What will you need to succeed in anticipating the decisive moments ahead in making your visions reality?

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