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## **Nine Issues for Not-for-Profit Executives in 2004 (And Beyond)**

Your members continue to find themselves in an often perilous state; challenged by ever-increasing degrees of competition or constant new complexities, regular change, new education and knowledge requirements. From my perspective, there are at least nine major issues that not-for-profit executives should think about in 2004 and beyond.

### **1. A knowledge transfer strategy**

The most pressing issue for your members through the next decade will result from the increasing pace of retirement within their organizations. As this happens, important knowledge will simply “walk out the door,” and your members must start preparing for this eventuality.

The first wave of baby boomers is approaching retirement age, and an ever-increasing number of senior executives and staff will move on. Important knowledge -- operations, strategy, markets, products and services -- will be lost forever if an organization doesn't ensure that it passes its knowledge on to the next generation of leaders and staff. Knowledge retention and knowledge transfer will be the most critical issue you will need to prepare your members for.

They must learn about the nature of the challenge facing them and the practical methods and strategies they can adopt to minimize risk and maximize results. More specifically, they'll need awareness and guidance on the issue of “knowledge succession planning” (in the short term) and, subsequently, how to implement full-blown knowledge transfer programs.

Educate yourself on the nature of the knowledge challenges your members might face in the coming decade and the methods you might use to help them plan and cope with this challenging new reality.

### **2. “Change courage”**

The pace of change affecting your members continues to accelerate at a furious pace, and you'll need to ensure they can understand the change that might occur and its implications on their professional lives. One of your key roles will be helping them develop the skills to cope with incessant, ongoing change, and turn change from a challenge into an opportunity.

We live in a period of unprecedented change, with rapid market and product developments, furiously challenging new forms of competition, and ever more rapid innovation. Then there's the change being driven by unforeseen external events – such as a new focus on ethics and a worldwide focus on security issues, to name but two. The skills, capabilities and knowledge requirements now expected of people are no longer static, since everything changes almost overnight.

Add it all up, and your members are struggling with issues they might not even have dreamed about just a few years ago. They're being hammered relentlessly by change, and many of them might be ill-prepared to cope. That's why your role will continue to take on the issue of ‘change’ as one of ever increasing importance. You'll need to be a “change agent” for them, educating them on the unique change issues and trends affecting them. You'll also need to become a “change manager,” helping them cope with change by focusing on change in newsletters, conferences, meetings and events.

Provide them with the ability to be “change leaders” -- experts in navigating their own organizations safely through the shoals of change tossing them about.

### 3. Tactical to strategic transition

There is a rapid need to help effect a transition of the skills and roles of members from those that are tactical to those that are more strategic. Given the impact of change, organizations need more assistance than ever before in defining strategy, and translating strategy into action.

Chances are they aren't getting a lot of help in doing so, because there's a big disconnect within organizations between management and staff. A recent survey of major organizations found that only 12% of senior executives believe that a majority of staff understand their company's business strategy. If there was ever an indicator for how many people are failing to cope with the change swirling around them, and are mired in a tactical role, it is certainly found in that statistic!

Nowhere is this tactical focus more pronounced than with middle management. They do what needs to be done to help an organization function and manage, but can they provide the additional assistance to help the organization cope with incessant change? If not, then they might not be bringing needed value to the organization.

A key role is to help members understand how they can bridge this disconnect by playing a more strategic role within the organization. This means learning the essence of how to bring strategic value to an organization in one of three ways.

- Run the business better: how can they help achieve cost savings and/or efficiencies through their activities?
- Grow the business: how can they help attain competitive advantage and/or revenue enhancement through what they do?
- Transform the business: how can they help achieve other core business goals?

If they can provide these services to the organization, then they are successfully effecting a change from a tactical to a strategic role.

Can it be done? By all means – at BASF, HR professionals who once spent 62% of their time on clerical work are now focused on everything from career development to acquisition integration, activities that are far more strategic – and far more useful – to the organization.

### 4. Attracting younger members

Many organizations are now witnessing slower rates of membership growth among younger people, as well as less member involvement by those under the age of 30. Issues of member attraction and relevance are increasingly becoming front and centre as a new generation takes on a greater role in the workforce.

Your challenge lies in the fact that many young people are not joiners; they're not convinced of the value that comes from belonging to a peer group. In their ever-connected world, young people – their viewpoints, issues, opinions and activism -- are often global, not local. They might care more about free trade issues in developing countries than about your efforts to increase the visibility of your profession. They might spend more time networking with friends on chat-lines than in developing valuable professional relationships through your networking events. They might think there's far more relevance participating in a global Web log than attending your national conference.

And many of them continue to reject the traditional career path of long term jobs. Instead, many establish themselves in small organizations that provide needed skills regardless of where they might be. Indeed, they might not even be in an organization that your current membership outreach activities take into account.

Their unique perspective on the world – a world that is ever-smaller, tightly linked together, and always available – means you'll have to work harder to provide them with a membership role and benefits that are far more relevant to their needs and concerns.

You can only do this if you truly understand who they are, and how they think. That's why it might be a good time to look at your Board composition. If the average age is over 40, you've got the wrong mix. This might be the year to recruit at least two or three young people to tap their insight. After all, they'll be your organization's future and it's critical to involve them now.

## **5. Partnerships**

One of the most challenging issues for your members is that of "making partnerships work." The increasing complexity of technology and business has made it almost impossible for any one organization or person to do it all. Successful organizations must focus on their core competencies and seek partners to assist them in other areas. That's why the partnership issue continues to be important. Your members need ongoing insight into leading-edge trends, such as where effective partnerships have made the difference between failure and success; successful methods in managing partnerships; how to provide for successful outsourcing; how to make partnerships work; and countless other issues.

As you assist your members with the partnership process, you might also consider introducing the partnership issue in a variety of other ways. For example, it might be time for a joint conference involving your members and associations that are close partners. You might consider the need for task-forces and working groups involving your own team and other partners that will examine the unique challenges and issues that are coming about as partnership takes on a greater role.

In other words, you need to weave into your organizational dynamics the same type of partnership issues that your members are currently grappling with.

## **6. Dealing with communication dysfunction**

It might also be time to help your members out of the technical morass in which they now find themselves. The last ten years have seen a remarkable level of connectivity emerge – we're wired with cell phones, Blackberries, PDA's and countless other devices. People are always on, always connected, and always available.

The results are quite dramatic – people work harder than ever before, and from an increasing number of locations. They're time shifting their day, starting work at home in the morning with a home-based PC, continuing to work during their commute, spending a full working day in which they're plugged in and turned on – and doing it all over again on the way home before checking out their e-mail again just before they go to bed.

That's why the issue of work/life balance continues to be important, but with an entirely different spin – how do we provide for work/life balance in the digital age?

Associations need to put into perspective the lifestyle, management and social issues and challenges resulting from our willing acceptance of the 24/7 work world. What cultural barriers might exist within organizations that could prevent a much needed slow down? What are the health care costs that come from the increased stress that comes from never getting a break from office issues? It might be an opportune time to challenge your members with the issues, and determine how their own organizations might respond.

## **7. Increased value in the annual event**

Despite today's speed of communications, there is less human contact in the workplace than ever before. There's an even greater need than ever to bring people together; to create and share the passion, and build relationships.

Sure, it's important to explore and implement the full range of distance learning, video education and other capabilities. Keep in mind that people can feel disconnected. They can miss out on passion and lose focus by living in a technological world. In today's age, the annual event and other events remain important.

After all, in a world of e-mail, fax and cell-phone connectivity, it's all too easy for people who share an area of focus to lose sight of important objectives, to share information about the trends and issues

affecting them, or learn from the simple value of networking.

## 8. Strategic events

Of course, our complex world also means that you'll probably need to bring members together more frequently than ever before. The days of the one, big annual convention blowout, however, are gone. In a world of constant and rapid change, you'll need to bring your membership together for strategic education purposes. If you think about it, a world of constant knowledge growth implies a world of constant change – and constant change demands regular knowledge transfer, often at events and meetings.

A good example is SARS – an unforeseen world event created a pressing need for many medical meetings to educate health care administrators on unique and challenging circumstances: for medical professionals to learn about the latest knowledge and research on SARS; for emergency medical personnel to understand the unique issues in transportation of SARS patients.

Use that as a barometer for your future events. You'll have a pressing need for far more strategic events -- often arranged at short notice -- to deal with pressing issues. Call it "just-in-time meetings," if you will. If this is to be our reality, then learn how to translate this potential new reality into action.

## 9. Contingency planning

Last but not least, you'll continue to be faced with the issue of planning for a world of uncertainty. Recent events have taught us that surprise might be the dominant force affecting our future. Every association executive – and indeed, every member – must become masters in all the nuances of preparing for constant surprise.

That's why education and training in the issue of contingency planning will continue to be a hot button throughout 2004. Everything we've learned suggests that we must now plan to deal with the unexpected. The law of unforeseen actions means that we've shifted from the predictive future to the massively unpredictable future.

We've got to work hard to plan for multiple scenarios, multiple contingencies, and multiple plans. It's something most people have never been trained for – and they sure need to be trained for it now.

After all, anything can happen.

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