

7 MEASURES OF SUCCESS.....A SUMMARY

In his best-seller, **Good to Great**, Jim Collins analyzed businesses and identified key characteristics between "Good" companies and "Great" companies. The American Society of Association Executives and the Center for Association Leadership, contracted with Jim Collins to conduct a similar study of associations. In his new book, **7 Measures of Success**, Collins identifies What Remarkable Associations Do That Others Don't.

Following is a summary of his findings. Collins and his team selected nine associations that immediately stood out as having performed consistently in the black and having maintained a consistent member/donor base during the study period. These became the study group of remarkable associations compared against a comparison group. These nine associations included:

- AARP
- American College of Cardiology
- American Dental Association
- Associated General Contractors of America
- Girl Scouts of the USA
- National Association of Counties
- Ohio Society of Certified Public Accountants
- Radiological Society of North America
- Society for Human Resource Management

The 7 Measures of Success Summary

Commitment to Purpose

1. A Customer Service Culture
2. Alignment of Products and Services with Mission

Commitment to Analysis and Feedback

1. Data-Driven Strategies
2. Dialogue and Engagement
3. CEO as a Broker of Ideas

Commitment to Action

1. Organizational Adaptability
2. Alliance Building

Commitment to Purpose

Measure 1: A Customer Service Culture

Remarkable associations demonstrate their commitment to their members in everything they do, from answering the phones, to responding to e-mail, to developing quality products and services. But having a customer service culture goes beyond individual encounters with members. Remarkable associations build their structures, processes

and interactions –their entire culture – around assessing and fulfilling members' needs and expectations. Staff, leaders, and members know who the association serves and listen to the members. But providing excellent service doesn't translate into "We'll do everything or anything the members ask." It means the association makes every effort to understand the members' needs and attempts, within the confines of mission, to meet them.

Measure 2: Alignment of Products and Services with Mission

Successful associations consistently found a way to connect their reason for being to their programs and services. Comparison associations failed to link the mission to the development of strategic direction, operations, products, and services that would define who they are. For example, the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) provided association management services to 21 related subgroups or specialties. But they determined that being in the association management business was a diversion from its mission to educate radiologists and support radiological research. They released all but three academic societies that were deemed central to its core purpose – careers, research and education. A comparison association found itself in a similar situation of managing special interest groups within the membership. These groups continue to drain its resources, energy and staff attention, thereby losing focus on mission.

Remarkable associations view members as a population to serve, rather than a market to sell to. Products and services are selected to benefit their members, not only provide the association revenue. They are not afraid of failure as long as they're reaching to meet member needs and staff and volunteers openly analyze failures. They do not believe in permanent pilot projects. They either pull the product or restructure the product and launch it again.

Commitment to Analysis and Feedback

Measure 3: Data-Driven Strategies

Remarkable associations gather information, analyze it, and use it to become even better. "Data-driven strategies" refers to a continuous loop where they track members' needs and issues as well as the wider environment, then incorporate the findings into strategic and operational planning and program delivery. Comparison associations struggle with brand identity and membership stagnation or attrition. The American College of Cardiology's executive committee serves as the strategic planning committee and assigns several key measures to each of ACC's strategic goals. Measures such as statistics on conference attendance, membership numbers (satisfaction, retention), financial performance, legislative contacts are included. The American Dental Association uses ongoing focus groups and surveys and adapts its structure to fit needs rather than try to fit issues into existing structure. The Society for Human Resource Management database tracks membership activity. The AGC earmarks annual marketing budget for business/product development to reduce dependence on membership dues.

Measure 4: Dialogue and Engagement

Remarkable associations nurture a culture in which information is analyzed and shared throughout the organization. Everyone, not just senior managers and elected leaders, is expected to use that data to figure out what actions the data are demanding of the organization. Dialogue and engagement is characterized by a culture where employees see the potential to contribute and share equally in the responsibility to contribute and add value to the association. Remarkable associations do not exhibit "silo mentality." They share a common view of who the association is and how well it serves its members. Employees of great associations share the same understanding of signature products. Staff focuses on how to give the board the data they need to set direction.

At Girl Scouts USA, which is undergoing a major governance restructuring, delegates devoted a day to discussing one question: What would our governance structure look like if it met the test of being efficient, decisive and action-oriented? All member feedback is funneled through six strategic teams – Program Model and Pathways, Volunteerism, Brand, Funding, Organizational Structure and Governance, and Culture.

Measure 5: CEO as a Broker of Ideas

The association leader must not only understand the organization's vision but also be able to engage others in defining, refining, and responding to that vision and all it entails. CEO facilitating visionary thinking throughout the organization and brokering ideas is the fifth measure of success. All the associations had transitioned away from an autocratic, controlling CEO at some point in the preceeding 20 years. The CEO must think in terms of what is possible and stimulate energy and engagement among and between staff and volunteers.

Commitment to Action

Measure 6: Organizational Adaptability

Remarkable associations don't just emphasize thinking strategically, they act strategically; consistently implementing their priorities. Most of the remarkable associations had weathered some crisis such as a financial setback or a leadership void. But successful associations learned from their mistakes and responded rapidly. NaCo consciously budgets at least 4 percent of its annual revenue to reserves. AGC made a commitment to decrease dependency on dues income and set a goal of having 50 percent of its income from non-dues sources through goal-setting such as: "eliminating management conference programs that continue to operate at a loss by FY 06."

Nothing is considered an entitlement or a sacred cow. The Ohio Society of CPAs eliminated chapters to create one state level of dues. They also held the view that dissolving chapters gave OSCPA direct access to all of its members and provided more