



INNOVATION, LEADERSHIP AND 'GETTING STUFF DONE' IN TODAY'S ASSOCIATION ENVIRONMENT

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BRITISH COLUMBIA

By: Manley McLachlan

I was asked if I was interested in contributing some thoughts on the challenges I experienced in Association Leadership over the 23 years I was involved in the construction association business. I've been retired from the BC Construction Association for about ten months. This provides lots of time to think without the daily adrenaline-fuelled rush of an ordinary day at the association office.

I was asked, "if you were to go back into this business what would you do, do differently, and perhaps with more energy?"

So, here are the questions I pose to myself and believe you should ask yourself. The questions are current and probing, but the answers -- yours and mine -- contain the **Really Important Stuff**. The pursuit of these answers is a real indicator of leadership. It's up to you to pose the questions even if they challenge you.

1. ARE YOU TAKING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S TEMPERATURE ON A REGULAR BASIS?

The old saying is "an un-aimed arrow never misses its mark," but **if you don't know where you stack up in the marketplace, you are not helping yourself lead the organization.**

Are your membership numbers plateauing or dropping? If the latter, what is the percentage lost annually for the past five years? If your membership trajectory is consistently in negative percentages, you don't need your accountant to figure out how many years you have left as a viable organization. If you have 500-member firms today and are losing 10% per year, in five years you will have lost over half your membership. I won't say in ten years you'll be dead because that will happen long before you are down to double-digit numbers.

2. ARE YOU SEEING SIGNS OF YOUR MARKET POSITION WEAKENING?

3. ARE YOU A MASTER OF TRENDS WITHIN YOUR INDUSTRY?

You will need to **know the difference between Lagging-Edge indicators and Leading-Edge** indicators to effectively master industry trends. You will also need to master the data that will generate both indicator types.

If your industry is consolidating, are you positioned to provide support and services to the emerging, big companies? Are you one of many organizations seeking to represent a dwindling number of companies and associations in your sector with offerings of old or traditional services?

4. IS YOUR INDUSTRY IN A STATE OF CONSOLIDATION?

Does your organization **operate without recognizing demographic changes, the economy, and the new technological reality members function in?** Are your current and prospective members becoming more sophisticated regarding what they expect for services and offerings?

5. ARE YOU OPERATING THE WAY YOU ALWAYS HAVE?

Do you continue to operate your organization according to deep-seated beliefs developed over time that continue to define what associations are supposed to be and do? In other words, are you doing things that way just because that's how things have always been done?

6. ARE YOU TAKING THE SIGNS, EVEN THE SMALL ONES, SERIOUSLY?

I believe the [recent ad campaign launched by the Chartered Professional Accountants](#) captures the **need to be ahead of the curve** in essentially everything.

If they don't, **you will need the board's support** on these matters, so that means that you are the educator. That is your role - its called leadership.

7. DOES THE BOARD WANT TO HEAR ABOUT THOSE INDICATORS?

8. DO YOU THINK IT IS WISE TO RELY ON A STRUCTURE AND APPROACH BASED ON A SYSTEM SUITED TO AN ENVIRONMENT OF PREDICTABLE PROBLEMS, REGULAR ROUTINES AND SIMPLE SOLUTIONS?

While the challenges are huge, there is a world of solutions available to you. However, **successful implementation will be based on how you lead your organization into the changing environment.**

LEADERSHIP, FUTURE FOCUS

Shortly after my start at BCCA, the Board mandated me to pursue non-dues related revenue. The Association was short on cash and membership revenue was declining. Without new revenue streams, the association would soon be in dire straights.

We determined that workforce availability was a real challenge and would grow in intensity year over year. Demographics (i.e., aging workers in an intensely busy marketplace with 250 billion in major projects on the books) meant workforce needs was a key leading indicator.

We initiated a program strategy that would assist individuals and their potential employers to connect with a minimum of supports. We targeted non-traditional worker sources and started with the Aboriginal Community in BC. It took some persistence but, in time, the Minister of the day, the Honourable Stan Hagen, took a leap of faith and provided \$50,000 in pilot project funding. In five months, 250 people were working at jobs in the Duncan area.

In ten years, this program grew to include over 10,000 jobs for aboriginals, women, landed immigrants, and people with disabilities. Nearly 50 million dollars in funding was applied to this workforce development solution, and BCCA generated small-but-healthy revenues to expand their research capacity and support in other areas. This was used to assist their members and the Construction Industry in BC.

We took control and took the lead in what has become a trademark service.

Never forget that as the leader, you are being judged on your response to all challenges. Your associations performance is a direct reflection of your performance in guiding it and, therefore, a reflection of your skills and expertise.

INNOVATION IN TODAY'S MARKETPLACE

I want to spend a little bit on innovation, as it is one of the today's leading themes. As with most themes that have been around for a long time, everyone thinks they know the words to this song, but few know the tune.

Innovation is doing things differently while maintaining order in your organization and achieving outstanding results.

I would say you need to embrace this innovation challenge and the corresponding opportunities; its your cue to demonstrate your leadership skills.

Leadership is a verb, not a noun.

Leadership is about action.

9. ARE YOU SPENDING THE CURRENCY OF LEADERSHIP WISELY?

Your ability to initiate action will require the expenditure of the currency of leadership; **Energy**, **Presence**, and **Courage**.

- ✓ **Energy** means you can't show up for work and have a bad day. Everyone takes their cue from you. That's how you lead the parade: you set the pace and expectations for everything in your workplace, from civility and demeanour to productivity.
- ✓ **Presence** means you are there for your team. Never close your office door. You can't lead from inside a closed office. How open you are to questions and discussions is determined by your team's ability to meet with you when they have need.
- ✓ **Courage** means you must demonstrate your commitment by example. Taking on the challenges, big and small; and never showing hesitation or fear will inspire your team and assist them to aspire to achieve your organization's goals.

I said earlier that innovation is doing things differently while maintaining order in your organization and achieving outstanding results. Spending the currency of Leadership every day is the key to achieving innovation.

10. HAVE YOU ADOPTED A DAILY ROUTINE THAT RECOGNIZES HOW IT IMPACTS YOUR LEADERSHIP ROLE AND ENHANCES THE CONNECTION WITH YOUR TEAM?

Darwin didn't say the strongest would survive -- he said the ones most able to adapt will. Adaptation is change, and because the advocate of change is most at risk, you need to be courageous to achieve results.

About the Author



Manley McLachlan retired in 2017 as President and CEO of the BC Construction Association.

(BCCA), the largest and most inclusive construction organization in the province. Prior to taking the position at BCCA in March 2004, Manley managed the Saskatchewan Construction Association (SCA) for nine years and is highly regarded as having expanded and solidified their influence.

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