

Tips On Meetings and Leadership

Guilty By Association

One of the hottest topics right now is the topic of “quality” – quality products, quality service, quality member benefits, etc. But you can’t create quality by yourself. Each organization is dependent upon a number of other people and entities to deliver true quality. In order to make your organization’s commitment to upgrading its operations truly successful, stop to consider some of the “partners” you have.

For example, the second your speakers take the microphone, your speakers represent your organization’s image, and you have every right to set the standards for that image. Don’t blame your speakers for doing the wrong things if you don’t set out the guidelines for speaking to your group ahead of time. Be sure to:

- Insist on getting a written biography/introduction well before the meeting. Ask the speaker if he/she has a preferred introduction.
- Tell the speaker(s) they must be in the meeting room at least a half-hour before the meeting officially starts, to check out the room setup and audio/visual equipment.
- Determine ahead of time if the speaker will be allowed to do any promotion or sales from the podium. Don’t embarrass the speaker, the audience, and your organization by winding up in an awkward situation.
- Make sure the speaker is prepared to, at the very least, mention the name of your organization sometime during the program. This is especially true of keynote speakers.

Don’t Forget Thank You Notes

Once your meeting is over, don’t forget to send personal thank you notes to the hotel or restaurant staff to express your appreciation. Especially, if your organization plans to hold another event there in the future. Write to the people at the highest level of the hotel chain, region or property. Mention by name everyone who did an excellent job for your meeting, including the housekeepers, chefs, accountants, switchboard operators, etc. The little pats on the back will pay off with an extra effort at your next function.

Guard Your Meeting Rooms!

“As an attendee at the Spring Educational Conference and Awards Luncheon, let me say it was great...right up until the moment my wallet was stolen.”

An account executive at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, was a robbery victim at CSAE’s meeting at the Hyatt Regency O’Hare. Within two hours, their credit cards had been run up over \$5000.

The theft may have occurred during a refreshment break or during a breakout session, when according to another CSAE member, an “unbadged” pair strolled through a meeting room while the program was in progress. Descriptions by two CSAE members, made independently, matched perfectly.

This can and does happen anywhere, but here are some good ideas which should be implemented by all organizations and hotels:

- Have badge checkers at doors to seminar rooms and in break and refreshment areas.
- Have breaks inside function rooms, instead of out in open hallways (unless access is limited)
- Escort out anyone not wearing an official name badge, and
- Provide more and more visible (uniformed) hotel security.

There's Just This One Little Problem

Everyone has to deal with problems. Some of the problems seem to defy a solution and linger on and on. Many times the problems aren't solved because people don't want to speak against or question their supervisors, technical “experts”, or others by whom they may feel intimidated.

In addition, people tend to protect their own domain. This includes their hopes for promotions and their lack of knowledge about the subject. People tend to see problems from their own points of view, rather than from the broader organizational perspective. Often personal problems work against constructive, cooperative problems solving.

In short, focusing on a “distasteful” situation (a problem) can fill the air with tension, fear and uncertainty - often for both parties. Thus many times, people reach a solution without thoroughly examining the problems and all the possible solutions.

To solve a problem, follow the eleven step process outlined in the book, “Rate Yourself as a Manager,” by Roger Fritz. This process will help you to separate, identify, and work through a problem.

1. Define the problem in two sentences or less.
2. Find out the facts of the problem and the present level of performance.
3. Decide what the desired level of performance should be.
4. Determine how this desired level of performance was decided upon using previous historical data, industry norms, etc.
5. Brainstorm to determine what the possible cause may be.
6. Look at the list of causes and choose the most likely ones.

7. Brainstorm to come up with a list of alternative solutions or courses of action. List the ideas without evaluating them.
8. Determine how the ideal solution would be evaluated.
9. Evaluate each solution according to the criteria listed in #8. To score, determine if each criteria has a high, medium or low rating, repeat for each solution. For example, solution “A” may have a low time involvement, high cost, and medium feasibility.
10. Select the solutions that are closest in their evaluation to the ideal. The ideal solution may be high in feasibility, low in cost and low in time required.
11. Write out a time and action plan. Include target dates for each step of the solution. If the problem still exists after the solution has been tried, go back to the drawing Board.

Planning Helps During The “Honeymoon” Period

As you take on new leadership positions, you will find yourself involved in “honeymoon” periods. These are times right after you are appointed to a chairmanship or are elected as an officer and just before everyone is expecting to see results from the change.

Here briefly is how to make transition periods work by allowing you to make the most of the opportunity that exists during the “honeymoon” period.

Step One: Develop a mind-set relating to your new position. This will take some practice but is worth the effort. Close your eyes and picture yourself in your new role. Visualize potential interactions with others in which you see yourself carrying out your new duties. This approach will help you develop the attitude you need in the new role, and people will respond to the way you feel about yourself.

Step Two: Don’t let your eagerness to make changes push you into acting too soon. Keep as low a profile as you can until you know the turf. This means learning how Committee and Board members really interact.

Step Three: Ask questions of all the people working with you. The questions must be prepared in advance and have a definite purpose. You need to ask technical and non-technical questions. They include: How do you describe your job from a real sense rather than what your job description says? What do you need to do your job better? What are your personal goals?

You need to do this questioning without appearing to be interrogating. The purpose is to be able to understand on a one-to-one basis what makes the key people working with you tick. You cannot influence people without understanding them.

Step Four: Write out a list of people whose support you need to carry out your goals. Part of the success in building the alliance is letting these people know that you want them on your team and letting them know how they fit into the structure. Another factor is having frequent sessions with the team to explain your plans and to let members share their ideas. During the “honeymoon,” regular meetings should be held at least weekly with the individuals you have pinpointed as being part of the alliance.

Set out a transition agenda with a time frame for implementing the changes. Too many changes, even if they are the right ones, can bring about negative results by shocking the club's system.

Only after you have followed these steps should you start making changes; once you start, the "honeymoon" period is over. If you have sized up the situation properly, the changes will not upset your committee or club members. If you make judgment before getting a sense of what is really happening in the club, you may lose people who could have been tremendous assets.

Boards Work Better When Coached From The Start

The Board is the driving force – the key team – in the development of your club. Perhaps you haven't thought about the Board as a team, but that's what it is – a collection of individuals with specific talents and expertise who have been brought together, by chance or by choice, to perform certain duties on behalf of the "owner," the members. Because that is so, consciously think about building a team.

Why is team building so important? When you truly have a team, a group of individuals who function to support one another, to solve problems, to create positive energy and to promote the welfare of the organization, the other things, like the general order and disposition of business, fall into place. Unfortunately, your Board Team is pretty busy in their own lives, and you don't have the luxury of hours of practice in which to coach the members into a cohesive unit. You'll need to try other means to develop teamwork and team skills.

We suggest this three-step process to help you build a solid team.

Step One: The process begins with your attitude. If you see Altrusa as a woman's club, and you are its President "because someone had to be," then teamwork won't be particularly important to you. If, on the other hand, you believe what Mamie L. Bass said in speaking to the assembly at the first national convention, "We stand as sponsors of a great women's movement, convinced that organization is the tool to use where great needs exist," then teamwork will make meeting those needs far easier. You know it takes all kinds of teams – standing committees, subcommittees, Ad Hoc committees, informal groups – to accomplish the work of Altrusa in the most effective and efficient way.

Write a simple statement about how you feel about Altrusa, and how you see your role in it. Although, this might seem like a silly exercise, nothing helps you to focus your thoughts like the written word. Until you have some idea of what you want to accomplish as the team's leader, how will you be able to coach the team?

Step Two: Involves you and all the Board members. Players on sporting teams become acquainted through days and months of working with and depending upon one another on the playing field. They enhance this unity through after hour's gatherings where they kick back and laugh and talk about themselves.

Your team members need to learn about one another as Altrusans too. We can hear your reply now. "But we already know each other." Perhaps, it's more likely, however, that you know "of" one another. Do you know why the members of your Board are there? Do you know what they hope to gain from being a Board member? Had you even thought that they wanted to benefit in some way? Do you have any idea to what extent they are committed to the club, or to the Board – the team? Guessing and assuming are poor substitutes for knowing. Knowing gives you all a "level field" on which to play.

One way to begin is to write a mission statement for the Board. You gain some insight into what things are most important to the individuals and how well they work together when you devise a mission statement. You might use another way to open the door to team development, but the door must be opened if your team is to evolve.

Step Three: Requires that the team members have time to talk about their hopes and goals for their term on the Board. Ask each member of the Board to write, then read, or just say aloud, why she is on the team and what she brings to it. Once reasons are expressed for all to hear, and promises are made for all to know and depend upon, attitudes about and toward the group changes.

Your attitude toward the organization and your role in it, and knowing one another as individuals are important elements in developing a strong team, but they are only part of the picture. The team also needs to know what you expect from each person. What do you expect of yourself as President, and what are you willing to give to the team to make it effective? How do you see the role of each person, aside from their elected position?

Share your thoughts about how you see your role on the team and how you feel about Altrusa. A little understanding goes a long way toward developing a solid, effective team and having an outstanding year.

The meeting during which this information is exchanged and the evaluation of where strengths and weaknesses begin will set the tone for the year. Give you and your team time to think and talk. Provide every opportunity for a positive beginning, because one positive beginning usually fosters others.

Our Committees Make Our Project Work

Committees are the backbone of any organization. They make it possible for the club to meet its goals. They also carry out the work of the club in an efficient manner – or can, if they have the right ideas.

Idea 1. Committee work should be done in committee, not in a general business meeting

“What do you think we should do?” kinds of discussions are inappropriate in the business meetings. If a committee of five to ten members is unable to decide a plan of action, is it reasonable to think, much less believe, that an assembly of 20 to 30 individuals can do any better? When committee business intrudes upon your club’s business meeting time, meetings drag and members are discouraged from attending. Few of us want to work in our committees only to take up the work of some other committee during a business meeting.

Idea 2. Committees are empowered and obligated to make recommendations to the membership.

Those recommendations begin with active discussions in committee sessions, which result from meetings that are planned. Meetings that have agendas, begin and end on time, and promote full discussion among committee members, produce good and well thought out recommendations for the club to act on.

Here are some suggestions that will help your committees have effective, efficient, and fun meetings.

- Make sure your committee has the materials and the records from the previous year. There's no need to reinvent the wheel when the record of the past year is in the Chair's hands. If there is no record, make sure your committee leaves one for the next year's committee.
- Make sure your committee knows its purpose, as your club has defined it or as it is defined in the Special Section of the Altrusa Encyclopedia. Review those committee descriptions to ensure that everyone on the committee understands what the committee is charged with accomplishing.
- Agree that meetings should be scheduled well ahead of time and that agendas should be sent in advance of the meeting. Well thought out agendas and advance meetings and agenda announcements help increase attendance and improve participation. We all want to know our time is being used wisely.
- Agree that committee meetings will begin on time, regardless of who is present or absent. If you consistently begin meetings on time, the members will show up on time, or even early. (Why reward someone for being late by always holding the start of the meeting for them to arrive?)
- Make sure you have a Secretary for your committee who takes notes and then writes and distributes a report to every committee member in a timely manner, generally within a week to 10 days of the meeting.
- You should be informed of any motions or recommendations from your committee so that you can include them on the meeting agenda. This helps you to properly prepare for the meeting and the membership to know what's coming up. You might also run the recommendation or the motion by the Board. While the Board does not take action on an item from a Committee, its questions will help you to have your ducks in a row before you present your motion to the membership for discussion.
- Be prepared to report at every business meeting and to send a report to the newsletter editor. Have something productive to report. Plan to be productive so your report reflects your committee's interest in furthering the work of the club.
- Do something fun to celebrate your committee's success when the year is over. You've worked hard together, and you need a time to appreciate one another's efforts.
- Take your committee work on a project step by step, enjoy your time with one another, and look forward to the celebrations.

Inspire By Setting An Example!

Your membership and fellow officers will look to you to see how you behave and perform. If you are conscientious, ready to pitch in, organized and punctual, then your fellow Altrusans will be more likely to follow your example.

How can you honestly expect your members to be on time to club meetings if you are late yourself? Is it fair to ask Officers to be diligent in their duties if you're a slacker? Of course, you can't!

It is much easier to persuade your fellow members to participate and perform if you are asking them to do something that you yourself have already done. Be on time for meetings with well-prepared agendas, talks and reports.

Meet all deadlines that are set for your club.

Set the example for your club by sponsoring two or more new members in the coming biennium. One club almost doubled the size of its membership during the 1997-1999 biennium and the President lead the way by bringing in fifteen new members!

Don't be above performing any task, no matter how menial. If members are needed to clean up after a fund-raiser, then be at their side with a broom in hand. Never "pull rank" with your fellow members and officers. When your term as President is finished, you will be a regular member again.

Club Presidents' E-News (Mailing)

On a regular basis, International will send you the Club Presidents' E-News (mailing). The information in these mailings is not just intended for the President. Make it your practice to share these mailings with your Officers and members.

Now You Are The Past President

As Past President, your job is not finished. Be there to help the new President adjust and be successful.

Club President's Calendar

Recommended For Your Assistance

June

- Deadline for submission International Dues is June 15th.
- Schedule all Club meeting's and Board of Director's meeting for upcoming year.

July

- Start working on your Club's yearbook.
- Select a literacy project for Make A Difference Day.
- Encourage Club to enter Mamie L. Bass Service Award, Letha H. Brown Literacy Award and Dr. Nina Fay Calhoun International Relations Award competitions.
- Plan on attending the International Convention each biennium. (Odd years only)

August

- Start organizing your Make A Difference Day Project.
- Become a member of Club 21.
- Make a contribution to the International Foundation.

September

- World Literacy Day is September 8th. This is a great opportunity to debut a new literacy project.
- Prepare your 990's for your Club's Foundation (US only).
- ASTRA Club sponsor information form due to International.
- Grant Applications are due to the International Foundation by September 15th.
- Send your pre-Make A Difference Day Report to International by September 30th.

October

- October is Grants Fund month. Send a Club contribution to Altrusa International Foundation Grants Fund.
- Make A Difference Day is the fourth Saturday every year in October.

November

- Send your final report for Make A Difference Day to International by November 15th.
- Plan a community project for the holiday.

December

- Send a holiday contribution to the International Foundation.
- Half year dues (December 1st – March 31st)

January

- Elect your Club's nominating Committee.
- Award information available online..
- Make a contribution to the Foundation's Disaster Relief Fund.
- Participate in Add An Altrusan Day on the 3rd Wednesday in January.

February

- Confirm the name and address of your Club Treasurer.
- Review ASTRA Club Service Award information with ASTRA Club Officers.

March

- Elect Club officers and report results to International and your District.
- President-Elect to appoint Committee Chairs.

April

- Your Club Treasurer will receive International Dues information for your Club. Check with your Treasurer at the end of April to make sure the dues invoice was received.
- April 11th is Altrusa's Anniversary and it is Altrusa Awareness Day. Plan an event to commemorate this day.
- April is Endowment Fund Month for the Altrusa Foundation. Make a Club contribution.
- Complete and submit the Club Activity Report, used to determine the Distinguished Club Award.

May

- Present Club budget for membership approval.
- Report names and addresses of incoming Club Officers and Committee Chairs to International and District by May 15th.
- Completed Club Activity Reports due May 31st.
- ASTRA Club Service Award entries due to International May 31st.

June

- Participate in the Club annual meeting and installation.