



Let's not Forget **Half** of the **World's Population**

How to get the next generation of association leaders to join the board and how to ensure a diverse member representation - according to **Michael Kern**, executive director of Dekon Group in Istanbul.

When I agreed to write this article, I thought of the next generation association leaders just as the Millennials. After some research, I found out that many associations are still stuck with boards of the baby boomer generation, having boards in their sixties and above. So where are the next leaders? Why are many of them still not at the helm of their associations?

Tara Withington shared how her organisation, Executive Director Inc. (EDI), a leading Association Management Company (AMC) in Milwaukee, focuses on a diverse leadership as part of each client's strategic plan. Tara stated: "If diversity is not 'strategic or top-of-mind', it won't happen." One particular client began a major investment in developing the next generation of leaders as far back as 2007. Over the years, this focus has led to a substantial shift in the

composition of the Board, which now includes 46% female representation and a greater presence of emerging leaders. These changes came about from several initiatives spearheaded by the Board to promote diversity. For example, in order to be more transparent on how to become leaders within the Society, the Association developed a comprehensive "Path to Leadership" outline. This document helps professionals and others interested in the field to learn how to become more involved in the Society, and how those activities could someday lead to a leadership role. The Board has also invested in a greater focus on professional development activities for all career stages and developed a leadership program to help promote women in the field. These types of activities can help bring about significant results in developing more diversity within the leadership of associations.



When speaking to the Secretary General of one of our AMC clients about getting a younger generation to join the board, I always hear that they are not interested, or are just focused on publishing articles, or have no time alongside their scientific careers. What we observe then is an aging board, often ultimately becoming a group of retired scientists, which has an even harder time to cope with new forms of communication such as social media, blogs etc. Getting the turnaround at this point needs a lot of energy and a deliberate strategy.

So let's talk about the most stereotyped generation, the Millennials. This generation, born between 1980 and the late 1990s, is usually described as lazy, poorly prepared and without aspirations. Several studies proved that these commonly held stereotypes about Millennials are wrong. According to the Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2019, "The youngest generations are no less ambitious than their predecessors; more than half want to earn high salaries and be wealthy." Another study on Latin American Millennials indicates that 41% of them study, 21% work, 17% do both activities and 21% do not work or study.

So what can the millennials mean for associations? An earlier Deloitte Millennial Survey shows that "Millennials are also charitable and keen to participate in 'public life': 63% of Millennials donate to charities, 43% actively volunteer or are a member of a community organisation, and 52% have signed petitions." Let's not forget, today Millennials and Gen Zs make up more than half the world's population and, together, account for most of the global workforce. They are not the future, they are our present.

The keywords seem to be 'active onboarding'. Carol McGury, executive vice-president at SmithBucklin, suggests: "The value proposition needs to

be different – invite the nextgen voice to the table. Inviting individuals to participate in a meaningful dialogue will help shape the future of the association or organisation." Engaging them and inviting them to the table, rather than waiting for them to join, means that you engage them in the organisation and also help them shape their leadership skills. SmithBucklin has also found that there is less of an appetite for traditional paths, years of board service to eventually move to the chair or president position. SmithBucklin had great success as an organisation in creating meaningful nextgen programs resulting in board leadership. Giving nextgen individuals meaningful work to do on behalf of the organisation, inviting their voice to the table and showing them how their input would make a meaningful difference... at the end all this didn't take six years of service.

And, if we look to D&I, meaningful programs within the association ensure that the membership is representative of the industry. But don't forget to get a feedback about the onboarding process and continuously improve. Getting new blood to old boards means first to be strategic, but then to be open for change, and especially to be serious when giving meaningful projects and inviting to the table.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Michael Kern, executive director of Dekon Group in Istanbul. For nearly 30 years, Dekon has been organising meetings of all sizes, worldwide, for their clients, who are global, regional and local associations, corporations, medical and technical societies, NGOs, NPOs and IGOs.

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