

How to Develop Your Own Leadership Style

For IAPCO, **Annalisa Ponchia Baccara** analyzes the entire ecosystem of capabilities that association leaders need to make sure their organization is both sustainable and future-proof.



There is not a school or university where you can learn how to become an association professional, you can take a Master or attend some good courses, you can gain certification, but the vast majority have learned on the job. A job you may be hired for directly from within the organization, or from a company professionally serving associations. Whichever the case, you will find yourself *leading the leaders*, who in most cases are *'volunteers'*, a factor that tends to complicate your professional life, in the context of a continuously changing landscape.

When you are an association professional the goals of the association become your own, as you are hired to make sure they are met: growing educational portfolios, developing membership acquisition strategies, staying meaningful and remaining a leading force in your sector, maintaining traditional revenue streams and identify new ones, and so on.

You are in a superior position and most qualified to support and advise the leadership on how to implement numerous programs and activities. The requirements, as well as expectations, are often to be an expert in any field and facet of association management, for which you must continuously grow your expertise, at a fast pace.

AN ENTIRE ECOSYSTEM OF CAPABILITIES

Depending on the size of the organization and the team managing it, you may need an entire ecosystem of capabilities. How your strategic plan and implementation approach are developed will have a major impact on how your organization can control and minimize the risk to which it is exposed, while competition for what associations traditionally have offered is rapidly increasing.

Your role as a leading professional has become more complex and as such requires increasingly a keen understanding of business, strategy, education, and technology. This new complexity calls you to run "learning" as a business and to promote it as such to the multiple stakeholders involved.

What essential competencies and capabilities do you need to build? And where do you get your training from? Professional development opportunities and the use of best practices, identified through a peer reviewed collaborative process (normally achieved within the same organization), are excellent but it is important to gain knowledge outside your association environment, learn from other sectors and specialized experts.

With the right coaching and support, you will advance your skills in delivering advice constructively, learn how to foster creativity and innovation in your team, accelerate your leadership goals and make a high-impact contribution to your organization.

LEADERSHIP STYLE

Effective boards and overactive volunteers tend to overcome decision-making biases, rather than optimize resources and talents, and make proper concessions and trade-offs. This is a difficult balance to reach and maintain, especially when they are your clients or those hiring you. Associations are often isolated silos and professionals may become hostages of the board and the leadership.

To escape this ploy, develop your own leadership style, learn effective dialogue, boost your capacity to change and move to a higher level of a personal leadership path that ensures you remain inspired and resilient for the future.

In summary, while you are proactively focusing on growth and innovation for your organization, there are sensitive areas you must properly address:

- Governance - You will want to strike a balance between control and empowerment, between brand identity and adapting to different cultures and perceptions, between engagement and risk management.
- Legal issues - when operating for an organization you must be aware of potential legal risks to which the association is exposed.
- Finance - strive to maintain control and transparency over your financial operations, through clear and timely reporting and accounting.

Expertise is gained over continuous benchmarking and knowledge exchange, take any opportunity from high-level education (masters offered by universities and business schools - or even the MiniCourses Boardroom launched before summer) to networking and membership to associations of this sector, possibly by volunteering yourself in one of these.

You have a chance to shine no matter what the environment, it is your job to recognize it and make it happen.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Annalisa Ponchia Baccara, CMP, CMM, Director of Innovation & Customer Experience & Director of International Congress Development, AIM Group International. IAPCO represents today 137 companies comprised of over 9,900 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries. info@iapco.org \ www.iapco.org

