

Transition to Past President

The past president can be an invaluable position in the association (recognizing some organizations call their chief elected officer “chair of the board.”) They have the experience and knowledge to support sustainability of programs and leadership.

Regrettably, upon passing of the gavel, some presidents disappear with a sigh of relief. Others have difficulty transitioning to their new role. Problems have included relinquishing authority, interfering with the incoming president’s agenda, or denying that the role and responsibilities have changed.

Opportunities

Opportunities to position the past president for maximize value.

- ❑ **Special Projects** – Most organizations have more good ideas than they have resources. Worthy projects end up in a “parking lot” --- programs that make sense but there is not enough time or money. The past president is ideal for shepherding a special project.
- ❑ **Wisdom** – A past president has leadership experience. He or she can mentor future leaders, guide emerging professionals and train new board members. At board orientation the past president can offer insights of successful governance. Invite past presidents to write for the newsletter.
- ❑ **Strategic Plan** – Though the role of president has ended the strategic plan continues. Most plans span 3 to 5 years. A past president can continue to work on that same roadmap for continuity and to ensure progress.
- ❑ **Inspire Past Leaders** – The immediate past president is often the best person to reach out to other past presidents. Suggest ways prior leaders can be involved through scholarship endowments, political action, research and teaching. Find a fun activity to engage past presidents.
- ❑ **Fund Raising** – The past president has respect among stakeholders. They can lend their name and skills to fundraising for special projects, the

foundation, community initiatives or a political action committee (PAC).

- ❑ **Good Governance** – Most immediate past presidents remain on the board for another year and many have a seat on the executive committee. The past president should be a model of governance excellence after ascending the leadership ladder. It's not enough to just show up at meetings, be engaged and offer help.
- ❑ **Public Service** – The association's message can be enhanced by serving on public and private sector elected and appointed boards. Positioning the past president on other boards is a valued role.

Smooth Transition

Anticipate the transition.

- ❑ **Attitude** - Mentally prepare the president for change. When the term ends the chief elected officer becomes a part of association history.
- ❑ **Space** – Seating at the board table has an impact. It may not be necessary to be at the head of the table. Give the new president space. One past president explained that with each board meeting he moved further away from the head of the table to show confidence in the officers. Be available to help but don't be a distraction.
- ❑ **That's Not How I Would Do It** – Nobody wants to hear, "When I was president we did things differently." The past president should be a good listener, allowing discussions to progress and offering input when it adds value or wisdom that others may not have.
- ❑ **Accoutrements** – The president may have gathered some tools of the job. When the term ends it is important to return association property, including the credit card that may have been issued, the gavel, stationery and business cards with the title "president." If an email signature is used touting the title of "President," be sure to make adjustments. If the association provides an upgraded room or suite at the annual conference, it should not be expected.

- ❑ **Team Player** – The board is a team. Every director supports the decisions of the board, including the past president.

- ❑ **Authority** - The past president does not speak for the organization unless specifically authorized. The current president is the official spokesperson, who can delegate that authority.

- ❑ **Nominations** – Some organizations use past presidents to nominate future leaders and make nominations. Be careful that the committee is composed of a cross section of the membership and not just past presidents.

There is an art and science to keeping past presidents engaged. It can have significant value to the organization and individual.

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Bob Harris, CAE, provide free association governance and management tips at www.nonprofitcenter.com.