

IMAGINE

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Association Models – Different Strokes?



John Pearson tells the story of a seasoned executive of an international ministry association arranging for a breakfast get-together while he was in town. John quipped, "I've admired this man's pedigree when it comes to understanding associations. He attended the American Society of Association Executives meetings, took courses and read all the books, but he wanted to get my opinion regarding new plans for the association he was running."

So, the friend laid out his plans and asked "What do you think about this?" John replied almost automatically, "Well, that depends on which model of association you follow." This well experienced association executive had never realized that there were different models of associations and each model would approach a planned service, product or program differently. After John mapped out on a napkin the five common models of associations along with the strengths and weaknesses of each, the colleague told John, "this information alone made the trip worthwhile."

What model of association do you follow?

There are five common models of associations and each has its own strengths and weaknesses. This article seeks to simply create awareness about these models and ask some basic questions about functionality and relationships. Which model is the best for your Evangelical Alliance? What role does the member play? How does the leadership of the association relate to the members? What are the expectations for each?

Association as Business

The "association as business" model sees the member as a customer. The association sells products, programs and services to the member/customers. The relationship is one way. Members are not expected to contribute anything except money.

Association as Parachurch Organization

The "association as parachurch organization" model differs from the "association as business" model in that the members are more actively engaged in the organizational activities. Volunteerism is encouraged. However, the member's role is principally that of a donor. This is a common model for ministry associations because we are very accustomed to this kind of organization. The relationship is top down.

Association as Expert

The "association as expert" model operates as the source of expertise. The association provides the information and needed expertise that members seek. Members may provide ideas or assist in the distribution of expertise, but the association leadership and staff serve the membership primarily by providing answers to the common concerns and questions of the members.

Association as Connector

The "association as connector" model serves to connect members with needed experts. The leadership of this model recognize they are not the experts, but are skilled at connecting members with the needed experts. Members may provide expertise. The relationship is more reciprocal, but random.

Association as Connector & Facilitator

The "association as connector and facilitator" model is a high functioning model where the association connects members who are the experts, and facilitates higher productivity through cooperation and collaborative efforts. Members are active participants, as well as beneficiaries.

John Pearson leads the Association Leadership Essentials course (ALE 1) and one of the "take-aways" for each participant is to clarify the most desirable model for each context and a plan to get there or improve how the association serves in its desired role. Association Leadership Essentials part one will be offered in September 2011.

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