

Inspiring Volunteers to be Leaders

By Lucia Anna Trigiani

I believe we are facing a crisis in leadership.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find volunteers to step into leadership roles. Those in our industry who ponder the future have great concern about the long term viability of attracting qualified quality people to serve on the boards and committees that govern community associations.

It is no wonder why. Leadership positions in community associations are not easy. They are demanding in terms of time and energy, not to mention, talent. They require creativity. They require patience. They require an ability to receive and digest criticism and then, to act on it. They carry with them great responsibility. They are without compensation. And, in many instances, they are thankless jobs.

Community associations are reflective of other organizations in this crisis. We are not alone. Many organizations are challenged to find people to volunteer and to lead. It is a frequent topic at the conferences for the professionals who staff volunteer, non-profit organizations like Community Associations Institute and like our community associations. So, a discussion about leadership in community associations is rather timely.

We need and want leaders – in our community associations and elsewhere. All you have to do to convince yourself of that is to turn on the television and watch the recent national political conventions. These conventions showcase leadership. Each speaker is delivering a message to inspire and excite. Regardless of your political persuasion, you have to notice that speaker after speaker is greeted with enthusiasm. The faces of the conventioners are full of delight and awe. They are charged up, renewed, refreshed. And, I believe it is because they are being inspired by someone exercising the qualities found in leaders.

Another recent example of leadership and our collective fascination with leaders is former President Ronald Reagan. Americans were transfixed by the reporting of the mourning of this icon. For many, the analysis of his presidency and his approach to leading restored positive feelings about our country. Again, whether or not you agree with his politics, he embodied leadership.

Why is Ronald Reagan one of the best examples of modern day leadership? I believe it is because he led by inspiring others. He led by example. He was positive and strong and unflinching in his personal views. He appreciated humor and could laugh at himself without being self-deprecating, even in the direst of circumstances. His first words to the first lady after he had been shot were this best, "Nancy, I forgot to duck." We connected with him because he was a communicator.

These are but a few of the qualities that we admire in others and some of what it takes to be a leader. What are the qualities of leaders?

Knowledge – Leaders are not necessarily the smartest people. But, they do surround themselves with smart people. They are students of their organizations and know them inside and out. They know their members. When they do not know, they know to ask and to get help from those who do know. They are advocates of being educated and informed. Followers like to follow someone who knows something, or who has lust for learning.

Strength – Leaders have the strength of conviction. They are unwavering in principle, but are confident enough to welcome opposing views and when appropriate, compromise to achieve results. Leaders exude confidence. Good leaders are decision makers who make well-informed and thought through decisions. Followers are drawn to confident people.

Good Manners – Leaders say thank you. They are gracious and inclusive, rather than exclusive. Leaders recognize the good in others, the accomplishments and the contributions of others. Leaders readily give recognition to those who are contributors. Followers want to feel appreciated.

Vision – Leaders have vision. They have a crystal ball into the future and develop a plan to address what they see. In other words, leaders are committed to strategic planning. They have a talent for anticipating issues and then planning to address them. Followers like to know where they are going and to plan for the journey.

Hardworking – Leaders work hard. More times than not, the successful executive is the one who makes the coffee in the morning and locks the door at night. Sounds like your mom, doesn't it? She got you out of bed in the morning and made sure that you were tucked in at night. And, she worked hard at home or outside of the home to support the family. Followers admire dedication.

Passion – Leaders are passionate about what they do. They love what they do. They believe in what they do. They are excited about what they do. Followers are drawn to excitement.

Trust and Respect – Leaders are trustworthy. They are honest. They tell the truth. Leaders are people of moral character – not who stand in judgment of others, but who set an example by the way that they live and work and volunteer. Followers want and need to respect the person

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Pia's Leadership Tips


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|----------------------|---|
| Know Your Community | Be On Time |
| Know Your Volunteers | Be Prepared |
| Exude Confidence | Communicate |
| Be Decisive | Be There — and Every-
where |
| Build a Team | Be Inclusive |
| Be Positive | Delegate |
| Be Gracious | Set Goals — Develop a
Strategic Plan |
| Give Recognition | Anticipate Issues |
| Work Tirelessly | Dissipate Controversy |
| Be Spiritual | Verbalize Expectations |
| Be Passionate | Set an example |
| Be a Cheerleader | Inspire Others |
| Think Things Through | Find the Lesson in Failure |
| Seek Advice | Celebrate Success |
| Welcome Input | |
| Act on Criticism | |

who is in charge.

How do we find the persons who embody these qualities? This is our challenge in the community association industry, or in any volunteer-based organization. While charisma is innate (John Kennedy had it; Richard Nixon did not) — leadership skills can be developed. We can inspire volunteers to leadership positions. By taking on in our own work and the way that we conduct ourselves the qualities of leadership, I believe we can cultivate leaders in our community associations.

We need to —

- Know our communities.
- Be decisive.
- Express appreciation.
- Be forward thinking.
- Work hard.
- Love what we do.
- Be honest.

We want to be led. And, I say, we need to be led, too. We need to examine ourselves and ask if we are leaders, first. We need to be students of good leadership and embrace the qualities of good leadership. We also need to be attentive to identifying leadership qualities in others and encourage those with the qualities of leadership to step up. As homeowners in our communities, we need to seek and cultivate leaders from within our ranks. As managers and staff of community associations, we need to support that effort. 

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