Preface

I bet you didn’t know that there is an association for bear research and management as well as one for Renaissance martial arts enthusiasts. The industries represented by trade and professional organizations are as diverse as human experience. But, whether members make a living driving trucks, acting in movies or performing heart transplants, their expectations for education, information and advocacy are remarkably similar.

This is one of the many benefits of working in our unique economic niche. We can learn from the challenges and successes of organizations across the spectrum of business and apply those lessons to our own situation. The 17 leadership profiles in this book include a wealth of knowledge and experience. Regardless of the size or sophistication of the association you represent, you will become a better leader by exploring these professional landscapes.

As valuable as the collective wisdom in this book is, I’ll issue a warning. You are about to venture into unknown territory. If you have been hiding from the future cloaked in the status quo, prepare for a reality check. The leaders who share their stories here are disrupters, innovators, and cultural shape-shifters. Some have had the courage to confront an untenable situation and accept the growing pains that were an inevitable component of success. Others have embraced change even though it came with professional risk.

Perhaps you and your board have been lucky. No crisis has rocked your industry or caused your members to question your mission. But If you imagine that clouds are not looming on the horizon, you simply have not looked far enough ahead. We are in the midst of a perfect technological storm. The same forces that are redesigning how business gets done are also reinventing customer expectations. Your members and constituents want you to deliver services and products better, faster and more personally than ever before. If your association can’t meet those demands, trust me, someone else is waiting in the wings.

This book is both a wake-up call and a guide for navigating the future. If there is one overriding theme, it is that technology can no longer be regarded as a tool or a tactic, it must become a strategy that saturates every aspect of your business. My own experiences leading several associations through technological make-overs have convinced me of the truth behind this concept. In every case, the value derived from this approach far outweighed the effort. Digital transformation can give organizations the power and flexibility to move from mediocre performance to unqualified success.

The authors of this book are veterans in the technology space. They have seen it all—from faxes and modems to integrating CMSs, LMSs and CRMs. They are fearless troubleshooters who have mastered diplomatic skills worthy of Middle East peace negotiators. But what has captured my admiration most is that as broad and deep as their expertise runs, they are still eager to discover the next new breakthrough or move on to the next platform. So read this book! Enjoy the similarities and divergences from your professional environment, and prepare yourself and your organization to break new ground, discover fresh markets and deliver the value your members will certainly expect.

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