

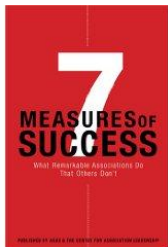
How Member-Centric Are You?

Who do you love to do business with: a favorite mechanic, hair stylist, or account manager? If you would rather "fight than switch," it's probably because they have put you first or in the center of their business. You feel that your needs are always met and your expectations exceeded. You would say those you are loyal to are "customer-centric."

Now think about your members. Do they love doing "business" with your organization? Although we usually think that all associations are "customer-centric" because they of their dues-paying members, not all associations embrace a member-centric business philosophy.

So what is a member-centric association? When association staff was polled on the definition of being member-centric, their common responses included:

- gives members what they want and anticipate their needs
- provides value as its primary motivation
- sees staff as customer service agents
- makes the buying experience the best it can be
- operates with a budget driven by member needs
- personalizes all communication



Being member-centric focuses on the interplay of **5 Key Elements** and sadly, many associations focus on some of them and not all of them. Creating a foundation for member-centricity requires an investment in all five elements, promoted by McKinsey Advisor, an association consulting firm and supported by the fundamental research undertaken by ASAE and Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*. The ASAE and Jim Collins research was discussed in-depth in the book **7 Measures of Success—What Remarkable Associations Do that Others Don't**

The 5 Elements of Member-Centric Associations are:

1. **Culture.** A documented, shared understanding among all staff, embraced and touted by leadership, which defines expectations on how the association interacts with members.
2. **Metrics.** Tracking, measuring and responding to data that defines success through the eyes of its members and for the organization. One of the 7 Measures of Success pillars is being data-driven.
3. **Knowledge.** Belief and practices on collecting, sharing and responding to the challenges, needs and expectations of members.
4. **Technology.** Planning, managing and leveraging tools (e.g., database, social media) to collect, share, and deliver information to all stakeholders in a timely manner.
5. **Segmentation.** Developing profiles of and understanding specific groups, or segments, of members to deliver on their expectations and to increase retention rates.

Developing a member-centric **culture** sounds easy and is often assumed that it occurs effortlessly. Define the culture you want to be known for and how you are currently aligning your staff to develop a common foundational base. Consider how Ritz Carlton has developed a simple creed and motto that all employees are accountable to delivering on. Its motto is "We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen." Its creed has only three statements:

- The Ritz-Carlton Hotel is a place where genuine care and comfort of our guests is our highest mission.
- We pledge to provide the finest personal service and facilities for our guests, who will always enjoy a warm, relaxed, yet refined ambience.
- The Ritz-Carlton experience enlivens the senses, instills well-being, and fulfills even the unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests.

Employing **metrics** is no easy task and is oftentimes what many associations lack clarity, consensus, and consistency on. When working with two different boards of directors for strategic planning sessions, two distinctive questions were asked to frame metrics: 1) how do members measure their success? and 2) how do we measure our success? Both of these questions can generate key metrics to monitor and yet they are so very different from one another. The first one focuses on meeting member expectations (i.e., reasons for joining, program evaluations, quality of interactions with the association, likelihood of referring/rejoining) and the second one has an inward focus (i.e., budget vs. actual, new membership sales, retention, percentage of revenue generated from a new source). For your success, you need both types of metrics although the first set will drive the second.

Knowledge management requires a commitment to collecting information, making sure that all those who need to know have access to the information, and acting on what is known. Knowledge involves establishing metrics that track how well you deliver on what members want. What's the sense of doing a membership survey if you don't share the data, analyze it, and create action plans on the insights?

Leveraging **technology** is a complex undertaking and investing time in developing and maintaining a Technology Plan is wise. It's about ensuring that your Association Management System (AMS) delivers customized service to members and provides you with data to serve them better. Your strategic goals should be linked to everyday operations and technology should help you to deliver on your long-term plan. Meet with your staff to identify common challenges and agree upon solutions to streamline operations, make communication more effective, and leverage the database to be the central repository for membership management. Find ways for members to view and update their database records, view their program attendance, committee participation, and other interactions.

The secret to association success is in **segmentation**. Believing that all members have the same values and want the same things is a recipe for failure. Most associations' membership is comprised of several distinctive segments or groups of members. Creating 5-6 segment profiles that identify common values, reasons for being members, challenges and needs, and preferences will help you to evaluate your programming/benefits menu and to understand how to meet these segments' expectations.

As you may have deduced, being a member-centric association is no easy journey, and it's perfectly understandable why truly member-centric ones are a minority. As the great Napoleon Hill wrote, "*An important principle of success in all walks of life and in all occupations is a willingness to **Go the Extra Mile**; which means the rendering of more and better service than that for which one is paid, and giving it in a positive mental attitude.*" I guess that's what those we are most loyal to have been practicing all along and their success is evident in having us as their longtime customers.

Cathi Hight

*Cathi Hight is president of Hight Performance Group and has over 20 years experience in performance improvement. She helps organizations build sustainable futures, improve processes, increase productivity, and develop staff & member loyalty. Hight Performance Group is the developer of the **Member Retention Kit**. A master facilitator, trainer and consultant, Cathi offers strategic planning, leadership and staff development, and a toolkit of publications, webinars and assessments. To learn how we can help you create a member-centric association, contact Cathi at (720) 304-0747 or e-mail: cathi@hightperformance.com*