Strategic Resilience for Associations and Their Executives: Coping in These Turbulent Times
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About TMC

Robert Van Hook, MSPH, CAE and Jackie Eder-Van Hook, MSOD co-founded Transition Management Consulting, Inc. (TMC) in 2000 as a way to bring together skills in association and operations management with a deep understanding of human and organization development, and group dynamics. In eight short years, TMC has developed a network of affiliated consultants, and an impressive national reputation for providing stellar services to associations and nonprofits nationwide. TMC has successfully completed over 40 interim engagements in associations and nonprofits throughout the United States.

Professional interim executive leaders provide organizations with short-term executive-level expertise when hiring a long-term employee is not feasible or advisable. Using a professional interim executive is appropriate when:

- The organization wants to assess and/or stabilize operations before beginning an executive search for a successor executive allowing the incoming executive to hit the ground running and focus on strategic issues;
- There is insufficient time to conduct an executive search, which can typically take six months or longer to complete;
- The successor executive will follow a long-term executive or "Founder;"
- The organization has major upcoming events or is undergoing a major transformation requiring an executive who can manage the process; and,
- The organization is moving to or from an association management company or moving the association's headquarters from one state to another without relocating staff.

Effective transitional leadership insures that organizations do not lose momentum. Without an effective transition, the organization runs the risk of making the successor executive’s entry and tenure vastly more difficult and often unsuccessful. For additional information, visit our website at www.TransitionCEO.com.

In addition to interim management, TMC also provides executive search, transition and succession planning, executive coaching, consulting services, and training.
Overview

September 2009 was a global wake-up call that demonstrated the fragility of our financial systems. Worldwide financial institutions including banks, investment houses, and insurance companies teetered and threatened to fall. Only prompt and unprecedented action by governments around the world, have kept whole systems from collapsing.

Several months later, we are watching businesses struggling to keep their doors open and governments propping up heavily leveraged corporations in an attempt to keep capital moving. The price of failure is yet unknown. Our anxieties increase as we learn of personal and business bankruptcies, massive layoffs, restructurings, home foreclosures, increasing unemployment, and ever-increasing deficits. Regardless of how we got here, or who we might want to blame; focusing on the cause does little to salve our fears or those of our families, staff, and members.

The nonprofit world has certainly felt the impact – declining membership, and decreased revenue and participation, this has resulted in downsizing, consolidations, mergers, and even at least one bankruptcy filing. Very few financial analysts anticipated the current economic situation despite what some believed was an inevitable rebalancing of the markets.

As a profession, association management has often waited until a crisis occurs before we respond to what in hindsight seems like basic good management practices. While September 11th and Hurricane Katrina were wake up calls to organizations to create business continuity plans and update our bus books1, we weren’t motivated enough to implement executive succession plans. Now, here we are with another crisis – this time a global crisis and we again find ourselves flatfooted. While, much to our credit, many associations have set aside reserves, few gave little strategic thought on how to prepare for a stark economic downturn – one that lasts for years or decades, or upgraded our critical thinking skills or practiced downside management.

Association and non-profits continue to operate with an industry- or profession-centric tactical approach at the expense of expanding our thinking. We fail or at least seem reluctant to create innovative new processes or products that uniquely benefit the work undertaken by associations and their elected and staff leaders. In large measure, associations as a whole have been satisfied with incremental change – doing the same thing, only striving to do it better.

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1 A bus book is a binder that contains names and telephone numbers of who has access to certain critical information in the event that an exec is hit by the proverbial bus. It is a woefully inadequate response to succession planning.
Yet, we are living in a time of fundamental changes in our world and organizations. We have new trends and crises to consider.

- Global financial system collapse
- Beginning of the end of petroleum era
- Changing climate and increasing environmental degradation
- Decreasing availability of clean water
- Decreasing availability of safe, affordable food
- Increasing technological innovation
- Shifting demographics
- Increasing legal and regulatory pressures and oversight
- Increasing time pressures
- Increasing competition at all levels
- Changing and increasing consumer demands (Is consumerism dead?)
- Increasing social and global networks
- Changing nature of work and workers
- Overwhelming federal budget deficit

It is our contention that in the increasingly unforgiving marketplace in which we operate, finding ways to do the same things we have always done, only doing them better, is unsustainable.

Especially now, it is vitally important that association and nonprofit leaders critically examine their own leadership styles, and cultural fit with their organizations, assess whether they have the “right” people on the bus, and determine how to strategically leverage staff, elected leadership, members, and stakeholders in support of the organization’s mission. Never before, have we realized that we have so much at stake in an increasingly interdependent world. How these seismic economic shifts will affect associations and nonprofits is a critical question for us all to attempt to answer.

Recognizing the challenges in our profession and industry, Transition Management Consulting, Inc. convened a broadly experienced group of professional interim executives and consultants to consider the ramifications of possible future events. Using the tenets of scenario planning and analysis tools this group weighed the ramifications of possible future events, including those that are certain to occur, may occur, or unlikely to occur. Scenario planning tools are not designed or intended to serve as a prognostication tool, predicting the future, but rather it is a method to teach and encourage ourselves to think about opportunities and challenges in a uniquely different way. Whether any of our outcomes actually come to pass is irrelevant. For our team of interim executives and consultants, this exercise served to open up new ways of thinking for ourselves as we support our client’s transition to the new future.
Scenarios

Participants were tasked to build a scenario that typifies a possible future for voluntary organizations in the current state of high uncertainty. Three scenarios were prepared:

1. Total Meltdown - 10-20 year recovery period;
2. Rollercoaster – 3-5 years of ups and downs; and

For each scenario, participants asked given what has happened since September 2008, what is the likely impact on associations and nonprofits in six driving forces of change, namely Society, Technology, Economics, Politics, Environment, and Global.

**Total Meltdown.** In this scenario, the current economic crisis becomes the new equilibrium with a 10-20 year recovery period. The global economy is in a state of depression.

**Rollercoaster.** In this scenario, the current economic rollercoaster continues with great fluctuations in financial markets globally. Market swings continue for 3-5 years before leveling off to a new relatively steady growth trajectory.

**Treading Water.** In this scenario, the current economic crisis is a temporary one lasting 18-24 months. Government actions shore up financial institutions, stimulate the economy, and effectively remedy the current crisis in the United States.

The details of each scenario within the driving forces of change follow. We encourage you to consider these points as the starting place for discussions in your own organizations. While it is possible that your thoughts may differ from ours, we hope it provides sufficient grist for conversations within your own organization.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCENARIOS</th>
<th>TOTAL MELTDOWN 10-20 Year Recovery</th>
<th>ROLLERCOASTER 3-5 Year Recovery</th>
<th>TREADING WATER 18-24 Month Recovery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECONOMIC</strong></td>
<td>Larger financial institutions prove vulnerable, collapse imminent as access to credit and revenue from financing arrangements dries up</td>
<td>Volatility in financial markets</td>
<td>Financial markets rise, but slowly and not to pre-crisis levels</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values of assets plummet and stay down</td>
<td>Continuing insecurity about finance and the value of assets</td>
<td>Property and asset values stabilize</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Many big businesses go under, merge, or devolve to smaller entities owned by new owners</td>
<td>Some big businesses go under, merge or devolve to smaller entities owned by new owners</td>
<td>Businesses tighten their belts. Institute hiring freezes, pay increases, 401k contributions. Delay spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prices go down</td>
<td>Limited lines of credit; commercial credit available is tight</td>
<td>Limited lines of credit for a while, but situation gets back to normal within 12-18 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No lines of credit or no credit available</td>
<td>Business supply chains are interrupted either due to shortages or due to fear of business to have too much stock on hand</td>
<td>Certification and professional licensure becomes more important for differentiation and as an economic barrier to entry</td>
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<td>Increased healthcare costs cause basic healthcare services to be postponed resulting in sicker patients. The US struggles to enact a national health plan due to staggering costs and complexity.</td>
<td>U.S. struggles to contain healthcare costs through under-financed national health plan</td>
<td>U.S. struggles to contain healthcare costs through national health plan</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>POLITICAL</strong></td>
<td>Government programs grow and new stimulus programs are created, increasing budget deficits</td>
<td>Government programs and new stimulus programs grow, increasing budget deficits</td>
<td>Government programs and new stimulus programs grow, increasing budget deficits; political backlash to government interventions in the economy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greatly increased regulation, especially finance, accounting, banking</td>
<td>Increased regulation, especially in financial markets, accounting and banking</td>
<td>Increased regulation, especially finance, accounting, and banking</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Federal, state and local governments suffer because of diminished tax base causing severe cuts to services, and increased taxes</td>
<td>State and local governments suffer because of diminished tax base causing governments to significantly cut services and raises taxes</td>
<td>State and local governments suffer because of diminished tax base causing government to cut some services and raises taxes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong leaders likely to emerge; risk of demagoguery</td>
<td>More legislative activity at all levels of government</td>
<td>More legislative activity at all levels of government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                      | TOTAL MELTDOWN  
10-20 Year Recovery | ROLLERCOASTER  
3-5 Year Recovery | TREADING WATER  
18-24 Month Recovery |
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>Increased reliance on technology, but technology budgets slashed and systems are cobbled together</td>
<td>Increased reliance on technology, but technology budgets reduced. Technology upgrades delayed or eliminated</td>
<td>Increased reliance on technology, but technology budgets reduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>Environmental and social disaster despite larger investment in ecological protection</td>
<td>Continuing environmental degradation despite more ecological programs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>GLOBAL</td>
<td>More civil unrest in poor countries as economy suffers and food supplies dry up</td>
<td>More civil unrest as poor counties get poorer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIETY</td>
<td>Consumers purchases more focused on essentials</td>
<td>Pressure to do more with less</td>
<td>Pressure to do more with less</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Charitable donations are scarce and targeted to most essential service organizations</td>
<td>Steep decline in charitable donations</td>
<td>Two-year decline in charitable contributions increases pressure on the most under-resourced, vulnerable nonprofits causing them to merge or go out of business</td>
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While participants were interested in developing all three scenarios, in the interest of time, they selected one on which to focus. The consensus was that given the economic volatility and current downturn, it would be most useful to focus on a 3-5 year timeframe and expand the *Rollercoaster Scenario* while recognizing that it was only one possible future. We think it is ironic that 3-5 years is the typical length of a strategic plan. While 3-5 years was the group’s final consensus, at least two individuals thought it was more likely to be a 5-7 year recovery.

Participants expanded the Rollercoaster Scenario and considered its likely impact on associations and nonprofits in a number of relevant domains. This included intense concentration on membership, meetings, staffing, government affairs, operations, technology, and reserves and capital. The following are general conclusions:
Membership

Obviously, association members are feeling the impact of the current financial crisis. In general, the American public has responded by holding on to their assets and buying less. Association members’ and potential members’ decisions to purchase memberships are declining with further declines expected. Decreased membership and spending has the potential to affect affinity programs based on member spending. Association members who do stay will expect for more demonstrated value from their memberships and a clearer return on their investment. This will be true particularly as companies and organizations are less inclined to pay for memberships and unemployment increases shifting expenses related to dues and continuing education to individuals. Associations will need to find new ways to provide value and demonstrate that value to members.

The inclination to withhold membership may be countered by a countervailing need for collective action in difficult times. Of course, trade associations and individual membership organizations may have different experiences. However, we did not differentiate between them. Associations that provide credentials related to licensure or job entry or provide access to jobs are likely to see strength in their membership. Trade associations and others with active government relations programs should be able to retain their membership at the current level or possibly even see some minor membership growth. The opportunity for associations to increase membership through the promotion of their collective support and effective action on behalf of members.

It is even possible that some members will rally around their favorite association as some of us are currently doing by visiting our favorite neighborhood restaurants and businesses to help insure that they too will weather these challenging economic times and remain open once things begin to normalize (which, optimistically, we hope occurs.) The downside will be if the member belongs to three or four associations and chooses to continue supporting only one.
The challenge for associations is to develop services and programs to help members during these economically difficult times. These services could be as simple as ensuring programmatic and membership offerings are price-reduced. Additionally, using different means to distribute the information provides the platform members need to survive a downturned economy and be prepared to grow when the economy does turn around.

As more organizations do more with less staff and resources, the pressure on staff will grow. Programs that provide critical just in time information coupled with networking will be considered valuable and strengthens an association’s claim on the shrinking membership dollar.

MEETINGS

In tight economic times, executives, boards, and member organizations alike scrutinize travel and staff development more closely. Attendance at in-person meetings is expected to decline as the economic downturn continues well into 2009 and beyond. Even if the economy improves, reserves and investments have taken such a hard hit that there will be a reluctance to spend money without a clear payoff. While meetings still provide value for members in terms of education, business development, and networking, they and their organizations may look for other, less expensive ways to get these benefits. These economic realities may speed the utilization and adoption of various technologies, e.g., distance learning, teleconferences, and webinars.

The economic downturn has hit some association’s member industries hard, including companies related to the financial, construction, or automobile industries, for example. In reality, however, no business or industry has been unaffected. Companies are shrinking their exhibit spaces and sponsorships, or even backing out of meetings altogether. Depending on how bad it becomes, we may have only seen the tip of the iceberg. Even if companies and organizations are doing fine, there may be a tendency to be low key about their meetings. They may under-report or use the economy as an excuse not to participate. One person in the green building industry targeting high-end consumer products described it this way. Oh, people are still buying our products, but now we have to bring our stuff through the back door.
STAFFING

The continuing economic crisis will bring higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. As revenues shrink, association executives, too, will be forced to make hard decisions about hiring. Associations may not fill positions that become vacant, may delay filling them in an effort to economize, or may consider outsourcing. To retain their value, staff, on the other hand, will be fighting to keep the jobs by adding to their skills, and taking on roles heretofore not considered. They are less likely to change jobs under the assumption that “a bird in the hand...” We also expect to see retirement delayed for many senior executives, further squeezing increased earning opportunities for younger staff. Association executives may also postpone their retirement plans because of the poor performance of their personal retirement portfolios. This could mean that mid-level and second-tier managers who are ready to move into more senior positions could be stifled as older executives chose to “wait it out.”

When association jobs do become open, there will likely be a great deal of competition. It will be a buyer’s market for association staffing. An increasing number of applicants will come from sectors outside association industry, such as finance, banking, and manufacturing.

Association employers may be less likely to agree to an employee’s request for telecommuting, remote work, and flexible scheduling, either because there are fewer people in the office to begin with or the realization that there are a considerable number of people willing to work the terms set by the employer. Against that concern, is a question about what happens in the long-run, if management does not support at least some of those employee friendly issues. An additional countervailing pressure will be the increasing emphasis on associations to reduce the environmental impact of their operations.
**Government Relations**

The role of government has already expanded. A majority of the public agrees that government should play a large role in economic stimulation and recovery and since mid-September 2008, we have seen unprecedented governmental support of the financial, banking, and automobile manufacturing sectors. Support programs such as these will continue. The enactment of new government programs for infrastructure development and job creation are likely over the next 2 years. Health care reform will be a critical policy and budgetary issue. As to whether reform will actually occur, there is great disagreement.

These governmental responses will bring new opportunities for associations to increase their government relations activities as a means of building a stronger link to their members. Advance reports of significant changes to come in healthcare, and continuing support for the hard goods sector are but two areas.

**Operations (Revenue and Expenses)**

Maintaining revenues at current levels to keep them higher than expenses will be more difficult in the time period we examined. Just as families are cutting back on discretionary spending, associations are analyzing their spending more carefully. The recession is causing significant apprehension for association members. An increase in targeted communications can help reassure members that they are not alone and to encourage them to see their association as a partner. Volunteer boards of directors, hit with the same anxiety, will step up the pressure for association executives to do more with less. Complete and frequent communications can be a key to reassuring the volunteers that the association is being well managed. It will likely take more than simply allaying their fears, however. Association executives and staff would be well served to learn or brush up on a new set of management skills related to cost containment, downsizing, risk management, and downside management.

Association members will be making difficult choices in their spending, as well. Associations may find declining membership and programmatic revenue are not the only barriers to hitting revenue metrics. With reserve investments marginalized in this down market, the most successful association executives and boards are likely to be those that
develop metrics to provide early warnings systems and reassess their contingency plans for dealing with those realities immediately and realistically.

While the economic downturn is a problem for associations in many ways, it offers some tangible opportunities for those that are strategic and bold. Executives and their boards should invest time and energy to plan strategically. Bold actions and prudent investments in new programs and services coupled with sensible elimination of outdated services and products may have big payoffs and gain member loyalty.

**TECHNOLOGY**

Technology, especially in the area of communications, will be critical during the economic downturn. Members will have less ability to travel to meetings. Newsletters, webinars and teleconferences may be appropriate ways to keep members involved. Investing in improving the organization’s technology can help streamline operations and cut operational costs in addition to positioning the organization for being in the lead when a higher level of activity begins.

The value in having and fully utilizing an integrated and robust customer relationship management systems has never before been more useful or more needed.

**RESERVES AND CAPITAL**

Most associations with reserves find themselves with a much smaller portfolio than before the crash that began in September 2008. At the same time, pressures will increase to dip into reserves for ongoing day-to-day operational support or program expansion. Associations should exercise caution when considering selling off equities in a down market as that could limit the ability of the portfolio to recover, *if and when*, the financial markets bounce back. If associations are making additional contributions to their reserves, fixed income investments might be prudent. While prudence is a good thing, volunteer boards should not be timid about dipping into their “rainy day funds.” After all, *this is the rainy day for which we have been saving.*
Credit in the form of loans or lines of credit may be more difficult for associations to access. Shrinking reserve funds may also limit the ability of associations to borrow to fund buildings or other capital projects. Some associations, finding themselves with buildings too large for their downsized staffs, may have difficulty finding buyers, if they need to sell their building or liquidate other assets or tenants.

**VENDORS, TRAINING, AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

During down times, organizations tend to look more closely at vendor relationships and cut back on training and consulting that does not specifically help them deal with the economic downturn. This could make it a buyers’ market for some association services. For example, associations may soon find themselves in a buyer’s market for hotel rooms and other meeting related services as the economy shrinks demand. We wonder if there isn’t a potential consolidator business to help associations sell unneeded rooms or space as a way to avoid attrition clauses that seemed reasonable as recent as last year.

The downside of the cutbacks in professional and consulting services is that some valuable projects may be stalled or eliminated. The need for training identified before the 2008 downturn most likely still exists, but some associations will find it expedient or necessary to eliminate staff training. Eliminating or postponing board or staff development tends to be a shortsighted strategy. In fact, this period may be a good time for the association to “sharpen its saws.”

Because budgets are tight, association executives should look closely at vendor and outsourcing contracts to ensure that they are getting what they need and are paying for. More specificity in the contracts and keener negotiation skills should be a goal for every association executive. Now is an excellent time to recompete contracts and ask for reasonable concessions from long-term vendors when and where they might be warranted. In taking an

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2 In *Steve Covey's The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, he draws an analogy to a woodcutter who is sawing for several days straight and becoming less and less productive as the blade becomes dulls. The solution is periodically sharpening the saw.

Nothing endures but change.

~Heraclitus
honest, straightforward collaborative approach, it is possible for the association and their business partners to find a mutually agreeable outcome.

**STRUCTURE AND EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Associations are resilient organizations. They seem to survive – if not thrive – under some incredibly challenging situations and in harsh economic environments. The 2008 economic downfall, however, is putting a lot of pressure on newer and smaller associations, especially those that are not well managed or are redundant with other associations. The outcome of the pressure may be to shrink, merge, move to an association management company (AMC) or go out of business.

Even strong associations could take advantage of this economic situation to change some of the ways they do business. They could streamline the size of governing boards and cull committees and other member subgroups. They could trim old programs and services that no longer produce value for members. They could even consider a merger or takeover of another related entity that may be struggling as a way to consolidate their market. However, the management of those mergers will determine whether collaboration is enhanced or diminished.

The dual forces of a tight economy and the need to be effective in government relations should also push associations into more and stronger coalitions as they try to leverage their power and reach. National organizations with local chapters or components should look for new ways to collaborate with and strengthen the chapters to deliver services closer to members.
Maximizing Value by Leveraging Teams

In this section, we focus on what association and nonprofit executives must consider as some aspects of scenarios we described in the last section come to fruition.

Leveraging Senior Staff Teams

In tumultuous times, leaders need to work even more closely with their staff and elected leadership. The days of “I am the boss so I must have the answer” are long gone. In its place, must be a high level of cooperation.

Leveraging the power of your senior staff team has always been important in voluntary organizations, but in times of discontinuous change, it is no longer negotiable. As a leader, your ability to reflect upon and make changes in your behaviors and attitudes, and support the changes in behaviors and attitudes of your senior team may be the difference between success and failure for the organization, your members, your staff, and you. Consider answering the following:

- **Why?** Why does your leadership team exist?
- **Who?** Are the right people in the right jobs at this time in the organization’s life?
- **When?** Are the right things happening at the right time?
- **What?** What is getting done? Is there a mix of short and long-term initiatives? Are they strategic or low hanging fruit?
- **How?** Is the senior staff operating as a team? Are they by working together strategically towards a common purpose or are they a collection of skilled individuals?

A committed, skilled, and collaborative leadership team is needed to guide a corporation through a difficult period of change.

~David Nadler
Successful leaders are not afraid of introspection, asking for help, letting others be right, and sharing in their combined success. They understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and take steps to ameliorate those weaknesses without an overreliance on those strengths.

They also lead by example. Now, more than ever, we need leaders are willing to be for something as opposed to being against something. There is far greater momentum, energy, and excitement created by a positive vision than trying to rally the troops to defeat the latest enemy. Successful organizations in the future will thrive based on the commitment of its elected and staff leaders in accomplishing the association’s mission. This commitment engages members, excites and motivates staff to produce lasting accomplishments.

**Leveraging Boards**

As many of us can attest, mission-driven organizations often don’t lack vision or ideas, but rather they may lack the resources and the strategies to turn the vision into a reality. Executives can help their voluntary leaders, staff, and members to get clearer about what they are driving towards. In times of great uncertainty, associations are looking for and need strong, “tell the truth” leaders. Now is the time to step off the do, do, do and go, go, go hamster wheel and critically consider whether the place you are leading others to is a) where they really want and should be going, and b) whether you have the right strategies in place to get there. Is the organization’s “strategic plan,” in fact, strategic, or is it possible that the plan is *really* an assortment of tactics unrelated to the real costs of achieving them? It is time for a frank conversation with your leadership. If not now, when?

A global economic collapse like the one we are experiencing – whether sustained or not – is a sign that the old ways of doing things no longer work. The great lesson learned in this is our assumptions about how things work or should work are no longer valid, and our conventional measures of success are fast becoming irrelevant. As transition leaders and interim executive managers, we have first-hand knowledge about how leading an organization through a crisis can be extremely challenging. It requires more adaptability, resilience, self-awareness, and decisiveness than perhaps than we have ever had to muster.

Fundamentally, Boards do not like uncertainty. If it continues too long, they have a tendency to meddle in the best case and become dysfunctional in the worst case. For association executives, a meddling board can have dire consequences. How an executive acts, reacts, and leads will have a great influence on the extent of the meddling.
• **Offer hope without unfettered optimism.** Deliver bad news without sugar coating it along with a plan on to resolve it.

• **Instill confidence and trust through greater transparency and enhanced communications** – get out of your office, talk to people.

• **In the absence of information, people make up stories – make sure it is the story you want told.**

• **Don’t underestimate the power of “we are in this together”** – but you had better mean it. Show sensitivity to others – your members, staff, during reductions. Be human.

• **Let your staff and volunteers know you appreciate them more than ever.** Write heartfelt thank you notes.

• **Look for opportunities to streamline.** Now might be the time to eliminate or cut back on unproductive programs or services. If you haven’t already done so, implement cost accounting methods. Clean up the messes – literally and figuratively.

• **Finally get rid of unproductive staff and vendors.** Tolerating low performers is unsustainable and demonstrates a lack of credibility.

• **Insure that your strategic plan is well articulated** in its resource allocations, has a tactical or operational plan describing who, what, when, and where, and is tied to meaningful measures that let you know whether you achieved the intended result. Execute, execute, execute.

• **Make sure your ducks are in a row.** Implement or update meaningful succession and contingency plans. A bus book is simply not enough.

• **Look for ways to get your members involved without spending a lot of money** – theirs or the associations.

• **“Blow up the organization”** – consider what the probable future looks like and consider what you need to do and how you need to be organized to make it happen. Get everyone in the room and consider every possibility.

• **Remember that everyone deals with stress and anxiety differently.** Be respectful and help them learn how to be more adaptable and more resilient.
Building Resilience

Following the tragedies of September 11, the American Psychological Association (APA) explored resiliency and published their findings\(^3\) on how people adapt in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress, and ‘bouncing back’ from difficult experiences. On the way to becoming more resilient, however, they note that there is likely to be a good deal of emotional distress – yours and others no doubt, and offers ten suggestions.

**MAKE CONNECTIONS**

Good relationships are important. Accepting help and support strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in groups provides social support and helps reclaim hope. Assisting others can also benefit the helper.

**AVOID SEEING CRISSES AS INSURMOUNTABLE PROBLEMS**

We can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better.

**ACCEPT THAT CHANGE IS A PART OF LIVING**

Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

**Move Toward Your Goals**

Develop realistic goals. Achieve one thing daily enabling you to reach your goals.

**Take Decisive Actions**

Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from them and wishing they would go away.

**Look for Opportunities for Self-Discovery**

Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality, and heightened appreciation for life.

**Nurture a Positive View of Yourself**

Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

**Keep Things in Perspective**

Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.
MAINTAIN A HOPEFUL OUTLOOK

An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in enjoyable and relaxing activities. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

WRITING | MEDITATING | SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Some people write about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to trauma or other stressful events in their life. Meditation and spiritual practices help some people build connections and restore hope. The key is to identify ways that are likely to work well for you as part of your own personal strategy for fostering resilience.
Conclusion

We believe that the economic crisis that began in 2008 is not going away any time soon. A solid recovery may not begin until 2010 and may extend for several years after that. This crisis offers both challenges and opportunities for associations. Troubles in the general economy and shrinking assets and margins at the association will cause anxiety in governing boards as they seek to provide effective oversight. There will be increasing pressure on association executives to do more with less – to cut expenses and to hold the line on revenues. At the same time, associations will need to provide more services to members and demonstrate and communicate the value of services and programs effectively.

Times of trouble are times for collective action – one of the central reasons for associations’ existence. Associations should look for ways to leverage their core strengths and work with others to be more effective. They should look for strategic opportunities to invest in programs and services that will help support their members solidify their market. An economic downturn may be a good time to expand and acquire new assets while change is in the air and prices are low. Now is a time for bold, strategic thinking, and action. Carpe diem!

We hope that you will use what we have started to discuss the future in your organizations. If you do, please let us know your findings, or how you used this report to enable critical conversations.

For more information about this report or TMC’s transition services, please call us at 202.244.3163 or visit our website at http://www.TransitionCEO.com.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, and should not be attributed to the participants or contributors.
Appendix A - Participants

Thank you to the individuals who contributed to this project.

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