

# Taking the LEAD on Effective Association Governance and Management

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## Defining Leadership

In my over 23 years of experience (and counting) as an Association Executive, I have come to the conclusion that leadership is about people, planning and passionate execution or, which I refer to as, the “3 P’s of leadership”. This definition is further divided into 4 key elements which I acronymed, “LEAD”.

## The LEAD Elements

1. **L**evel with people – Starting up with your members, your Board and down to your staff, nothing beats being fair, accountable and transparent – all hallmarks of good governance.

I remember when I took over as chief executive of the Association 9 years ago, my first proposal was to have a Board of Directors retreat to review our organization’s vision and mission and to draw up a strategic plan to guide us forward. The result was a resounding success, not only in terms of new and fresh statements of vision and mission for the Association but also a strategic plan that is focused and relevant to our members and other stakeholders.

Another good thing that came out of the exercise is that this initiative cascaded down to the Secretariat staff which I headed. Armed with a new strategic plan, a mandate from the members and the Board, and ultimately an implementing work plan, I was able to structure the staff into functional business units, so each one precisely knows his or her respective role in the organization.

Another aspect of levelling up with people is constantly informing them on the goings-on in the organization, whether these are good or not-so-good news, say, telling the staff whether they are performing well or below par. Communicating and engaging with the staff is key to effective management. People appreciates truthfulness and honesty especially if this comes from their leader.

2. **E**xecute effectively and efficiently – Plans and openness to people are important. Equally important is executing the plans with pinpoint efficiency and effectiveness. Here, attention to details is the norm.

Executing effectively means you are able to monitor and measure the performance of your organization, hence it is necessary to develop key performance indicators (KPIs) in this regard. These KPIs include, among others, membership recruitment and retention rates, revenue to asset ratio, membership services provided, visibility actions, budget cost rendition, etc.

Executing efficiently, on the other hand, entails not only that your organizational structure is adaptive to its mandate but also flexible enough to maneuver in case of uncertain times. Also in this regard is making sure that the organization can function well despite staff travels, absences and resignations.

3. **Act decisively** – Part of execution but more on leadership quality is the ability of the Association chief executive to act prudently and decisively on issues and challenges facing the organization as it operates on a day-to-day basis. A good leader is one who makes informed decisions, hence the necessity to know the ins and outs of the organization's business and field of expertise. This can only happen if the leader is, in the first place, technically competent on the subject that the Association is promoting or advocating.

Also, it is noteworthy to mention that while decision-making is a process wherein all in the organization is bound to contribute their share of ideas and beliefs, ultimately, it is still the leader who is solely responsible for his or her actions.

4. **Drive with passion** – Associations, they say, are like small democracies, with members, Board, staff and volunteers interacting with each other and building consensus on issues confronting them and their organization. Election of the Board is also part and parcel of this democracy as well as the respect for the rights of all involved. For all an Association's uniqueness and intricacies, an Association chief executive must be able to navigate this vast and different interests with flair and wisdom and, more importantly, with the passion to serve.

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