

100+ Tips for the Incoming President

By Carolyn Gardner¹ with Bob Harris¹, CAE

“Don’t take yourself so seriously”...and other nuggets of presidential advice!

Responsibilities to the Organization

1. *The first three months of your term are the most time consuming.*
2. Two months before you take office is often has the highest dividend for planning your year.
3. The association² belongs to the members, not to you.
4. Contact a *new* member to serve on an important project, program or committee; you’ll be surprised years later when they recall that you were first person to ask them to take a leadership role.
5. Be able to recite the mission statement – memorize it.
6. Volunteers want to make meaningful contributions – consider yourself as a conduit or facilitator.
7. The president and the executive director work best as equal partners.
8. Serve food at meetings; but avoid too much sugar.
9. Don’t ask the staff to do anything personal for you. They are paid to manage the association – not to manage you.
10. Do away with “tired committees;” establish quick response task forces when they are needed.
11. *You are the elected president; not the king or queen.*
12. When you spend money, always be ready and able to justify that it is in the best interest of the organization.
13. Know the law and the code of ethics – don’t break either.
14. If you write your president’s message in the newsletter – do it with intelligence and good grammar, don’t ask staff to write your message. Consider that it will be in the association’s permanent history.
15. Your term is most likely only 365 days; then **you are history.**
16. Visit the members in person or make personal calls to let them know you’re a good listener and care; invite their participation.
17. Really know the bylaws and policies.
18. One of your roles is to develop future leaders.
19. On the board, you represent the association; *not* yourself or your firm.
20. Reserve a portion of each board meeting for futuristic “thinking.”



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21. No one can do this job alone; build your team early in the process.
22. Understand financial statements; insist on an annual audit.
23. Watch what you say at the podium...never hurt anyone with words.
24. You'll need to communicate effectively during your term – get the training necessary.
25. Let the vice president or president-elect learn as much as possible during your term.

26. *Avoid accepting gifts that may create an impropriety – set high standards for your year.*



27. Give members a reason to come to and enjoy your meetings.
28. Encourage 100% accountability among your volunteer leadership team.
29. On average, only 5 to 15 percent of your members/stakeholders care to serve in leadership positions.
30. Hold a leadership retreat before your term begins.
31. Today's members are innovative and expect their association to be similar.
32. Take antitrust concerns seriously. Penalty is jail time and more.
33. Understand you are leading a professional organization; not a social club.
34. Be up front with your executive director on all issues.
35. Respect your executive director, he or she is a true professional.
36. Ask your executive director's advice before you do something controversial.
37. Defend the board's position as your own, even if you didn't agree with it.
38. Remember to consider diversity and inclusivity as you make appointments and build your leadership team.
39. Streamline board meetings with well-planned agendas, consent agendas and rules of order.
40. Every association has red ants – learn to deal with them.
41. Attend at least one meeting of each of your committees; as a show of support – not to run the meeting.
42. Study the organizational chart; if you don't have one – create it so that you understand the proper flow of information and hierarchy.
43. Remember that many of your board members were told, "You won't have to do anything when you get on the board!"

Desirable Traits and Communications

44. Be the leader your members will respect and trust for years to come.

45. *Show respect for time. Meetings should start and end as announced.*

46. Take your role, but not yourself, seriously.
47. Avoid secrets and promote transparency.
48. Listen to the whispers and you'll avoid the shouting.
49. You can't please everyone but strive to be respected by everyone.



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50. Don't neglect your family or business. They need to be there and healthy when your term is complete.
51. Stay physically fit – stress kills.
52. Be flexible. It's not important that you always win.
53. Praise in public; criticize in private or not at all.
54. Contribute to the association's causes and urge others to follow your lead.
55. Be happy...smile a lot.
56. Never say, "We have always done it that way" or "we tried that once before."
57. Don't operate in a vacuum – know the strategic direction and operation of related parent and chapter organizations (including any subsidiaries.)
58. Learn to work with members of different age groups, interests, work settings and cultures --- promote diversity.
59. Desire to be inclusive --- dismantle the "good ole' boys club" image.
60. If you aren't moving forward, you are losing ground; you'll find a year will be over quick.

61. *Never use your position for personal gain.*

62. Never jeopardize anything said to you in confidence.
63. Tell meaningful stories but not stupid jokes; anything inappropriate stated in meetings and e-mail will bite you.
64. Everyone's opinion counts, especially if you are on the opposite side.
65. Mix and mingle with the members before every meeting; avoid head-table-snobishness.
66. Call on other leaders (past and present) for counsel; you're not in this alone.
67. Admit your mistakes; no one has ever done this job perfectly.
68. Don't be embarrassed to say, "I don't know."
69. Even a blank sheet of paper has two sides; be a good listener to others' input.
70. Consider taking "the road less traveled."
71. Mistakes are the basis for experience.
72. Make a point of introducing yourself often to people of influence; reach out to meet others.
73. Change will happen whether you are ready or not; don't fight it.

74. *Allocate time to read, read and read.*

75. Communicate, communicate, and communicate. And then again.
76. Members don't always read. Sometimes you need to communicate in a different way; plan on communicating your most important messages at least 3 times to be understood.
77. Own up to hurdles that may occur during your term; don't let surprises ruin your term.
78. Be the organization's main cheerleader.
79. Have the courage to admit someone else may have a better idea than you.
80. Attitude is everything.
81. The process of how you do it is often as important as what you do.
82. Don't take criticism personally.



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83. If you promise to get back with a member, do it the same day, if possible.
84. Don't procrastinate on the hard decisions. Nobody appreciates a fence-sitter.
85. Give credit often to volunteers, staff, etc.
86. Follow the KISS theory – Keep It Simple (Stupid)
87. There is a better way to do most everything – don't reject new ideas (and technology).
88. Respond promptly to email and telephone calls.
89. Promote the organization by wearing a lapel pin and use the logo appropriately.
90. Don't shrink like a violet when the difficult times come. They, too, will pass.
91. Invite everyone to enter with their opinions, but to expect to leave with a decision.

Outcomes

92. Your job is to advance the existing strategic goals; not to make a to-do list of projects you want to do during your year.

93. *You've heard the adage – “Ask a busy person if you want to get the job done...”*

94. Do fun things frequently during your term – life is short!

95. Remain focused! You'll find it easy to get off track.

96. Put the important items at the top of meeting agendas.

97. Have fun by keeping a journal and taking pictures.

98. Perception is reality.

99. Review your accomplishments every three months and make course adjustments.

100. Membership is voluntary; you want to end your term with more members than when you started.

101. Get the association involved in a project that has societal benefit.

102. Follow through with your promises and hold your leadership team accountable.

103. Celebrate small successes; they will add up by the end of your term.

104. Don't major in minor things. Give each issue only the time it is worth.

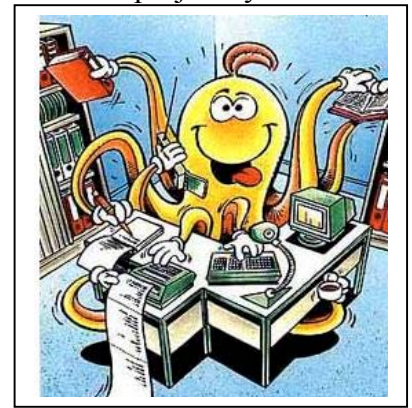
105. The road to success always has a few bumps.

106. Consider yourself as the steward of the organization whose outcomes will be remembered for years, decades or longer.

107. Two or three homeruns will be considered a successful year.

108. Don't take your eyes off the goal.

109. If you're not at the table, you're probably on the menu!



Note: Additional free information to help associations and elected leaders can be found at www.nonprofitcenter.com.

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