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NEWS

Rethink leadership to improve effectiveness

Educational session offers tools to help association leaders provide better guidance while advancing the mission

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CHICAGO—Offering practical, takeaway tools for association leaders to enhance their effectiveness, Anne Cordes, association executive for the Association Management Center, and Willy Steiner, president of Executive Coaching Concepts, led an attendee-packed afternoon session at the June 19 Association Forum of Chicago 2012 Annual Meeting.

Picking up neatly on the leadership themes just addressed by lunchtime presenter Henry Givray, CEO of association management firm SmithBucklin, Cordes kicked off the session, “Coach yourself to improved effectiveness,” with a blunt assessment of the challenges association leaders face.

“This is a uniquely complicated business,” she said, with success for non-profits difficult to measure — at least more so than for profit companies.

“But there are opportunities to be effective leaders today,” she continued, a perfect introduction to leadership coaching expert Steiner.

“Leadership is about proactively managing relationships all around you,” Steiner began, with trust a critical component. “It’s the lubricant that will make relationships work for you.”

He then addressed the negotiation process, laying out a two-by-two metric that separated agreement and trust into low and high groupings. He advised “getting rid of adversaries” because they offer low levels of trust and agreement, while “cultivating your opponents.” Though they offer low levels of agreement, they are highly trusted, a trait that provides value.

Steiner advised leaders to seek feedback—ask for it, be ready to respond, listen, clarify, express thanks and learn—and to become good listeners. But, he said, that requires much more than just being quiet. To listen effectively, you must clear the “AIR” by Appreciating what is said, Inquiring with follow-up questions and Responding.

With more than 100 attendees, the session prompted lively feedback and questions from professionals who sought clear, actionable guidance.

“I came to strengthen my leadership skills and to hear from an expert who’s a coach [on] what strategies he has to impart,” said Nadine Merker, director of volunteer services for the American Association of Diabetes Educators.

“I feel that in my role as a director, I can always improve and strengthen my skills. I got that here today.”

—Jerry Soverinsky