

ASSOCIATION BRIDGE, LLC

Leading community associations over deep waters

4000 by 40 – Now There's a BHAG!

By Thomas L. Willis, PCAM®

It was 2010. We knew we had something special, something of great value to the community associations in the area. The Washington Metro Chapter of Community Associations Institute had nationally acclaimed educators and leaders, and award winning programs and publications. We were an affiliate of a national organization that had taken the lead in supporting and educating community association volunteers and the professionals that served them from around the country for 37 years – almost 4 decades of collective experience and best practices.

That year the Chapter was the largest in the United States with approximately 2,700 members. But we were frustrated. While the membership numbers were impressive, we realized that only a comparatively small percentage of community association volunteer leaders around the region were members. So many volunteers working so hard without the benefit of the resources CAI and the local chapter had to offer. It was heartbreaking. We were working hard to provide great programs and resources to make life easier for all those volunteers, but the membership numbers stayed relatively flat. Something had to change. The need had to be met.

This was not going to be easy. Gaining access to those who would benefit to members can be problematic. For those that do not know CAI, there is the challenge of perception of value. Internally, with income derived from membership, we could only afford to employ a small staff. How could we break through to the next level of growth?

At the end of 2010, the answer began to become clear and a plan was hatched. With the establishment of a "Roadmap for the Future," a document so innovative it was later recognized with an award by CAI National, the Chapter's Outreach Committee was re-engineered to organize volunteers to do what would have otherwise had to have been staff functions. The entire process of marketing, sales, building and maintaining relationships, and member retention for association volunteers, business partners, and managers was exhaustively analyzed and assigned to subcommittees in coordination with chapter staff, as was building and nurturing of strategic alliances with other organizations. But something was missing. We needed a definable, compelling goal to galvanize the effort.

In 2012, the Chapter Board of Directors showed bold leadership when it approved the 4,000 by 40 membership campaign. The goal was set - 4,000 members by the Chapter's 40th anniversary in 2017! The Outreach Committee, already an enthusiastic group to be sure, was energized. A new "4,000x40" subcommittee was woven into the roadmap with a charge to brainstorm for innovative ideas on an ongoing basis to help achieve the goal. Momentum is building and great results are sure to follow.

There are those who would say 4,000 by 40 is unreachable given the historical membership data. It's true – if the chapter continued doing things as it had in the past, results would likely be similar to those we've had in the past (unless the Membership Fairy flew by and whacked us with her wand, I suppose). We choose to look to the future with a bias towards action. To get better results we must remain dedicated to doing better and working

smarter. As the Outreach Committee zealots and dedicated staff members continue to grow, learn, and refine the work, as the 4000x40 subcommittee mad scientists continue to cook up progressive recommendations, and as the Chapter continues to be an excellent and innovative resource, its members will be well served and membership will grow.

So then, what on earth is a BHAG (pronounced BEE-hag)? The term was coined by business authors James Collins and Jerry Porras in their 1994 book *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. A **Big Hairy Audacious Goal** (BHAG) is a strategic statement created to focus an organization on a single goal, which is audacious, likely to be externally questionable, but not internally regarded as impossible. The authors explain, "A true BHAG is clear and compelling, serves as unifying focal point of effort, and acts as a clear catalyst for team spirit. It has a clear finish line, so the organization can know when it has achieved the goal; people like to shoot for finish lines."

4,000 will happen. For the good of the area's hundreds of thousands of community association members and the thousands of community association volunteers and professionals that serve them, it has to.

If you have a passion for the work of serving community associations, please consider volunteering to join the Outreach Committee. hands make the workload light.

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