



TRANSITIONAL LEADERSHIP

A past presidency examined

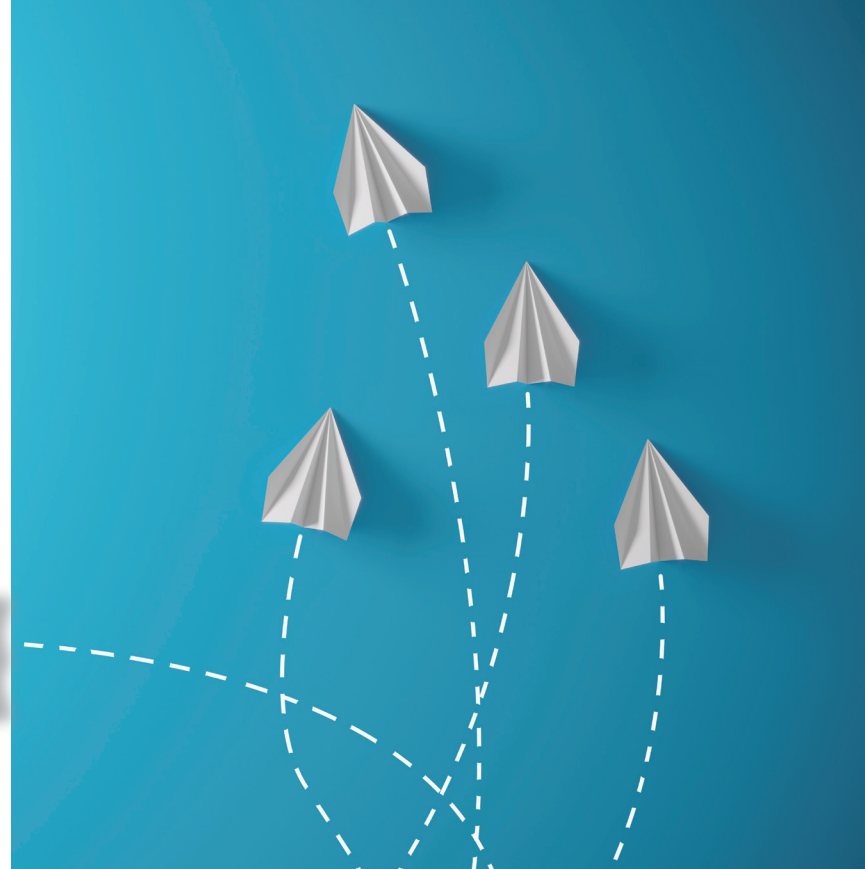


BY YASMIN L. STUMP, ESQ.

As I am writing this column, I am on the eve of the end of my term as Chapter 10 president. I face the conclusion of my presidency and ponder two questions. First, what useful advice could I provide to an incoming Chapter president based upon my experience? Second, how I can be an effective past president to the new president, our Chapter's members and the Association?

Looking Back for Advice Going Forward

In looking back, I must note that my presidency cannot be extricated from the effect of the COVID-19 virus. Candidly, my term as Chapter 10 president was far from what I envisioned several months before I took office. The global pandemic struck just a few months before my term began and hung over my entire term. The last world pandemic to devastate the United States was the influenza outbreak, and it occurred more than 100 years ago. No leaders who survived prior this major worldwide virus are available to consult about being a dynamic leader during a such a period. Since I recognize that many suffer from COVID-19 fatigue, I will refrain from complaining about the virus



and address the experience of serving as president during the pandemic from a broader approach.

In my life, I have encountered many unpredictable and highly impactful experiences, some devastating, which have been beyond my control. What I have learned is that all one can do is control the matters over which we have control. Take one day at a time and do not obsess about the future. The future always has a way of taking care of itself. As President Abraham Lincoln said, "The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time."

This past year was arduous at times, particularly because of the pandemic, but perseverance propelled me through the year. During challenging times as a leader, practice perseverance and in practicing perseverance, pace yourself. Scottish politician Walter Elliot said, "Perseverance is not a long race, it is many short races one after the other."

Other advice that I would give to an incoming Chapter president is to do your best. In Don Miguel Ruiz's book "The Four Agreements," one of the four agreements is, "Always do your best." In elaborating on this point, Ruiz said, "Your best is going to change from moment to moment." Doing your best does not mean that you have to be perfect. Do your best with what you have and know at the time.

In writing this column, I consulted a couple of esteemed leaders within the IRWA family. When asked what advice he would give a new leader, Daniel Bucan, SR/WA, Region 5 chair and Chapter 13 past president said that, as a leader, always remain professional. "Hold to your values and ethics in all aspects of life — personal and professional, including within the Association. Otherwise, you will not be successful or viewed by others as being sincere."



In remaining professional, be thoughtful in your communications. Others may not always agree with you and your decisions. Some may vehemently disagree and criticize you. When responding, remember that words are powerful and choose them carefully. What we say reflects not only on ourselves and the companies for which we work but also our professions and the right of way industry. It is important to remember, particularly as members of a professional organization, that our words have impact.

A new leader should be cognizant of traditions but not fear making changes. In “Nonprofit Leadership Transitions: Tips for Incoming and Outgoing Leaders,” authors Kris McFeely and Colleen Rogers said, “New leaders ... [should] take ownership of their new position right from the start — even if the departing leader is still there. That means making key decisions and pushing forward your vision for the future.” Although change is not always embraced, an organization never grows unless changes are considered and experienced.

Descending Gracefully from a Leadership Position

Over the years, I have served on numerous boards and in every position from newsletter editor to president. My own experience has revealed that there are past presidents who vanish altogether, never to be seen or heard from again. At the other end of the spectrum, there are past presidents who seemingly do not transition at all, holding on tightly to their past leadership positions. Clearly, neither is optimal, but does a useful middle ground exist?

Although published articles and books abound on successfully ascending to a leadership role, not surprisingly, the literature about gracefully descending from a leadership role is not abundant. Once again, looking within the IRWA family, past IRWA International President, Region 5 Chair and Chapter 7 President Patricia Petitto, SR/WA, R/W-RAC, offered this advice to a past Chapter president: “I don’t like to throw out traditions, but it’s okay for a new leader to try new things. Past leaders should offer to help whenever they can but always remember to assess the situation and make sure you are holding back enough to allow the new leader to come forth with their own ideas.”

A past leader’s support of the new leader can be vital to the new leader’s success. That support can be provided in a variety of ways. The past leader can share his or her experiences with the new leader and serve as a sounding board when asked. Introductions to the appropriate people who can assist the new leader can be made. The former leader can provide the new leader with resources to use in the new leader’s role.

In the article, “The Art of Stepping Down: When It’s Time to Bring in New Leadership” by Laura Schafer, according to growth stage leadership advisor Lori Dernavich, a past leader can continue to be a valuable contributor to an organization as long as he or she actually allows the new leader to lead. A past leader can allow the new leader to lead by providing the new leader with the space to make his or her decisions. Every new president has his or her goals and vision for the organization, which should be acknowledged and regarded by the former leader.



A past leader should be aware of boundaries and respect them with the new leader. Things can be done differently, and doing something differently is not necessarily negative. In fact, it may even be better for the organization. Also, not everyone operates on the same schedule. As long as matters are addressed appropriately, a past leader’s timeline is not paramount. Egos need to be put aside. Ultimately, the focus should be on what is best for the organization and its members, not promoting or being wedded to a personal agenda.

Finally, it is important to remember that the conclusion of one leadership role is a single step on the path to serving an organization. Other opportunities to serve an organization always exist, which are assets not only to the organization but to the individual. In a 2012 interview that appeared in the Right of Way Magazine, Petitto commented on her departure from the International Professional Development Committee: “It was difficult for me to leave, but I now see that our best leaders benefit from having new experiences.” 🌟



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