



New Year's Resolutions

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This is the traditional month for making resolutions — a commitment to change for the better. Ideally, we set measurable, achievable goals with deadlines, and succeed when we overcome inertia through initiative and discipline.

Associations need goals and struggle with inertia. Tradition becomes doctrine and the past becomes the pattern for the future. Today, this is a recipe for failure.

Every association executive I've encountered faces the same problems we do — declining membership, depleting finances, reduced mission resources. The structures and strategies that succeeded with past generations no longer work. Even the world's best buggy whip manufacturer went bankrupt 100 years ago as automobiles supplanted horses. The saying goes, "Insanity is doing the same thing while expecting different results." The same people offer the same perspective, subject to the same limitations, yielding the same results. If we declare the results unacceptable (and we are), we need to achieve different results by overcoming limitations through a different perspective that requires leadership to either grow or be realigned.

The key is recognizing a change in generational communications and behavior. We must adapt or perish; there is no middle ground. Inaction is inappropriate. We need a new strategic business model that fulfills the expectations of our current membership while appealing to the next generation of Sailors and friends of the Navy.

We are in three fundamental lines of business: membership, services, and operations. Membership begins with Friends of the Navy — free, web-based electronic chapters open to all that offer a social networking forum with AUSN branding. Look at <http://ausn.groupsites.com> to see where we're going. Our current membership structure of national, districts, and chapters generate insufficient member involvement. We will seek an expert in recruiting and retention to lead this with fresh, new programs.

Our services include the monthly "Navy" magazine, record reviews, seminars, conferences, and career advice. This is intellectual property created by our members that we offer to other members. We earn money because we create value in facilitating the transfer of knowledge. This is our core competency — a professional development "institute" — and what differentiates us from all other Navy associations. We do this well; however, we can and must improve with new technology and delivery modalities.

Operations are the "business" of being in business: marketing, sales, advertising, customer satisfaction, and order fulfillment. New operations include web advertising, effectively incorporating social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Groupsites, and emerging electronic media. Although we are a non-profit, that term only means shareholders do not receive dividends. We still must manage a monthly profit and loss business metric, or drown in red ink. This is a role for entrepreneurial business leadership.

This month, I am convening the statutory Strategic Planning Committee to help us reinvent our Association and translate this notional structure into a vision and a plan. I am confident that we have the experience and intelligence to "crack the code" to prevent us from experiencing the accelerating demise facing traditional associations. We aspire to the role of the leading Navy association, and with your help and support we will provide the leadership to create a successful future. Someone will solve this challenge, and it's going to be us.

Best wishes for a Happy New Year, and a sincere thank you to those members who are volunteering their time and talent to effect this change.

G. Mark Hardy