Bob Harris, CAE – Interview – 2011

Keynote speaker and consultant for non-profits and associations with more than 25 years of experience. He runs The Non-profit Center: Promoting the Association Management Profession website at www.nonprofitcenter.com. He is sometimes called the Martha Stewart of association management for his practical approach to management and governance.

Q. What’s your background? How did you become an internationally recognized speaker?

After college I worked in Washington at a White House founded program called Presidential Classroom. My job introduced me to trade associations, such as the US Chamber and ASAE. Later on I worked for a law firm with association clients. Before I knew it I was wrapped in the community of nonprofits. It wasn’t my career intent but I’ve always found associations and the power of volunteers fascinating.

Associations protect the public, set standards, promote prosperity and more. These are elements of democracy in our society. Some countries look to our association concepts with a desire to create a similar model.

Q. How many speeches do you do each year? How far have you traveled to give a speech?

My energies are directed in three areas 1) boards, 2) management and 3) strategic plans. My weeks vary from facilitation one day to training on another --- resulting in 100s of yearly commitments. I like the travel and specially enjoyed Amman, Tokyo, Minsk, Malta, Geneva, Toronto and London. In the US I am honored to teach for the US Chamber at the Institute for Organization Management.

Q. What is it about the world of association management that interests you?

I love the passion of volunteers to accomplish results on behalf of their constituent members. When things are working well in an association they can achieve great results.

Q. Can you tell me a bit about The Non-Profit Center?

I worked with an association management company for 20 years. Ten years ago I re-packaged everything to create programs to serve the needs of associations. My
website is the face of The Non-Profit Center. I add a best practice document every 10 days. There are 1000s of templates on management and governance, “why reinvent the wheel when free samples are available to adapt or copy?”

Q. What is the focus when you address association executives?

I like to show the greatness of the association community, how it varies around the world, and the blessing of US associations. There are so many opportunities in the profession but sometimes boards keep their staff focused on the trees and then we fail to see the beauty of the forests. When I do workshops, I enjoy teaching systems, governance and strategic planning.

Q. What are your at a conference of associations?

Meeting new professionals, a few “ah ha” moments and strengthening the associations.

Q. What’s the most important tool for association management and executives to possess?

It’s a combination of skills, passion and determination. From the desire to perform efficiently and effectively, to the ability to be flexible in an ever changing/challenging environment and transitioning leadership. Every manager should have the desire to be a model of excellence.

Q. What’s the one piece of advice you’d give to any member of the association world?

Association management is one of the most unique, interesting, exhilarating professions. Your career will benefit when you understand the importance of associations in America.

Q. If you could define your speeches in three words, those words would be:

Practical, Practical, Practical