TRENDS 2012 Association Vendor of the Year - Bob Harris, CAE

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To hear Bob Harris, CAE (yes, C-A-E – more on that later) describe his typical work, anyone would get exhausted just listening to his itinerary: four-day trip this week, three-day gig the previous week, and two-in-one-week engagements he has planned for the following week. And if you think that’s a lot, he also works for a hotel group and mentors a budding nonprofit professional…in Delaware.

Consultant, trainer, author and mentor, Harris is the TRENDS 2012 Association Vendor of the Year. “Bob’s sterling reputation as a consultant on association planning and training precedes him wherever he goes, and his commitment to raising the bar in association governance makes him an outstanding choice for Vendor of the Year,” TRENDS publisher Joel Poznansky said.

Using Tallahassee FL as a base (as much as 48 hours at a time by his estimate can be called a base) Harris is one of the most in-demand facilitators and trainers in the national association community, working with mostly association boards to improve their effectiveness. His market is outside the DC area, by design, and most of his business comes to him by word of mouth, or to be more exact, people call him. If there is an open spot in his spiralbound calendar, well you might be in luck. And it’s no wonder he is so in demand, this is what they’re saying about him:

“Bob, Keep doing what you do. You make associations get it right!”

“Bob, appreciate all you do for our profession and our community. It’s inspirational!”

“Your approach was measured and focused. I enjoyed watching you as you adeptly navigated more than a few preconceived notions, pitfalls, and even a few landmines. If given the opportunity in the future, I would welcome the chance to work with you again.”

www.ChuckFazio.com
Not bad for an association vendor who started out after college working in DC for a small lobbying firm and also the Presidential Classroom. Deciding he wanted a change, he moved to Florida, where he started an association management company (which he no longer operates). He also has worked for Hyatt Hotels since 1984 as an association representative.

As the feedback above notes, Harris has a no-frills approach to his work with associations. His style is to get right into it. Many times when board members are called into such training or strategic sessions, their first inclination is that it "will start with a group hug" followed by hours spent refining a mission statement. "No, nobody wants that," he said.

He works with associations to achieve effective operations, governance and strategic direction. Those who want an idea of what he has to offer need only look at his website, www.rchcae.com, to find hundreds of pages of free management tips and templates that he references in his sessions. For this free sharing, he’s been called the "Martha Stewart of association management."

Though he is considered a supplier, Harris’ commitment to associations is undeniable. He started the Tallahassee Society of Association Executives, which has grown over the years to about the size of state organizations. He also is on the faculty of the US Chamber’s Institute for Organizational Management. And, Harris thinks it’s important to promote ASAE’s certified association executive credential in many ways: as a hat, on his car tags, as a bookmark, even as temporary tattoo, all of which he produces.

His commitment to helping young professionals goes beyond US borders, as he mentors Alexey Talai, a young man in Belarus. Talai is building a facility that will serve as a place of business but where people can offer services to orphans and children with disabilities. Talai himself lost his legs and right arm as a 16 years old, when he stepped on a World War II landmine. Harris has brought Talai to the US a few times to study the nonprofit model here, work on his business skills, and raise money for his facility.

Harris will be honored at the TRENDS 2012 Salute to Association Excellence, Feb. 10 at the Capital Hilton in Washington, along with the Association Executive of the Year, the winners of the TRENDS All Media Contest and the TRENDS Young & Aspiring Association Professionals. Details: www.AssociationTRENDS.com/salute.