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Golden Commentary: Why these things matter

By MARK J. GOLDEN, FASAE, CAE | 12/13/2012



Chances are that if you are reading this, you consider yourself an association professional. That is, you view yourself as engaged in the profession of association management, rather than as a member of the industry or profession your association serves.

You probably appreciate the tremendous good that associations do for society, through professional development, certifications, standards, education, self-regulation, research and development, and social responsibility. You probably wish the public-at-large recognized this more, so perhaps as an individual association professional you participate in and support programs such as ASAE's "Power of A" public awareness campaign.

Also, you likely are concerned about some of the issues impacting associations – limits on government agency participation in association meetings or possible changes in the tax deductibility of payments to 501(c)3s, to name a few. Maybe you sign on to group letters to Congress or the executive branch when ASAE advocates on these issues. Perhaps you participate in the annual association fly-in and advocate directly on behalf of the association field.

But do you ever engage and involve the boards and membership of your own association in discussion of these issues? Probably not. Probably you consider these issues too much "inside baseball" in nature – things that could not possibly be of interest or relevance to members of the XYZ Industry Association or the International Society of Professional XYZers. They are concerned – you might believe – about their own industry and profession; any concern over the field of associations is left to you.

But wait a minute. If your association was prohibited from including staff from the agency that regulates your members in the educational seminars and conferences you provide, wouldn't that have an impact on your association's ability to effectively meet your members' needs and expectations? And wouldn't that affect your members? If the net dollars your association has to spend on association programs were reduced by taxation, wouldn't that impact the level of service you deliver to your members?

There can certainly be differences of opinion over the necessity or even appropriateness of the tax exemptions associations currently enjoy, or over the proper limits on professional/industrial interaction with government. These are suitable subjects for debate.

What is incontestable is the fact that any changes in such things will have an impact on the scope, scale and effectiveness of your association's operations. For any association worth its salt, that cannot help but impact the members your associations represent. So they should care.

Recognition of the positive impact that associations have upon society and what constitutes the appropriate level of taxation and regulation upon their activities matters to more than just association professionals. They matter – or at least they should – to your association's membership, too.

Are you doing your job representing the interest of your membership by ensuring they are appropriately aware and engaged on these issues?

Golden is the former executive director of the National Court Reporters Association and a past chairman of the ASAE Foundation. "Golden Commentary" is a column he writes about trends and news on the association community. Contact him at mjgolden@cox.net.

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