

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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Knowledge Is Power

"What's Going On?" by Stan Sias

WTCA is only as strong as its weakest chapter." I have recently moved from being involved with the Northeast Chapter and as a WTCA Board Member and component manufacturer to being part of WTCA staff. In my new position, I have been calling on chapters and learning a great deal and suddenly this phrase takes on a new and very real meaning to me. I want to succeed in my job, see the chapters succeed, and help the industry to succeed beyond our wildest imaginations.

There is an immediate need for WTCA, as an association, to revisit our mission statement and rethink how that mission applies to us on both the chapter and the national front. The "who we are" and "why we are here" is every bit as important for WTCA Chapters as it is for the association on a national level. Guess what else I have learned since I have now been on both sides of the fence? WTCA has much more information at its fingertips than any local component manufacturer can imagine. As our magazine has said over the years, "Knowledge truly is Power" and WTCA has a tremendous knowledge base. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to make all members aware of the vast knowledge base that WTCA has. I know this because it has taken me quite some time to comprehend the depth of information that staff has here. However, if we, as an industry, are going to take advantage of that "information power" we need to be certain that there is not a breakdown in communication between WTCA Chapters and WTCA as a national organization.

WTCA AS A NATIONAL FORCE

As WTCA staff, we are here first and foremost to protect and advance the interest of our members. We want it to be apparent that we are here to serve you, our members. In a few discussions I have had, there is at times a negative perception that WTCA is taking on the role of some sort of "Big Brother." I never believed this when I was a component manufacturer and now that I see the WTCA Board and staff from a different point of view, there could be nothing further from the truth. Everyone is committed to one thing and one thing only: helping each of you by doing work that none of us alone could do. The special thing about the work we do is it is specifically focused on component manufacturing issues. There is no other association in the industry that has staff dedicated to this purpose. I thought the track record of WTCA was great from the outside looking in. Being on the inside gives me an even greater appreciation for the hard work that is being done daily to have the track record that WTCA has.

The responsibility of giving the chapters a jumpstart, by encouraging them to become more involved, ultimately falls on the shoulders of the WTCA Executive and Membership Committee for oversight, and Anna Stamm, Suzi Grundahl and myself for implementation. In reality, however, this must be the responsibility of every board member and more broadly every member of our association. If we do not show leadership, how can we expect our colleagues at the

regional levels to carry out their responsibilities to protect and advance their interests locally? As members of the board and staff, we must recognize the importance of facilitating the culture that defines the heart and soul of WTCA in our chapters. That includes not only chapter reps and officers, but all chapter members. The culture is defined not only by the mission statement, but also by the policies that have been adopted, reviewed and reaffirmed over the years. The vision crafted by this statement paints a very clear image of what the WTCA Board views as critically important issues. The spread of this culture is absolutely essential to the strength and vitality of our organization.

REGIONALLY SPEAKING...

As discussed at the Open Quarterly Meeting in May, there are two modes of conduct occurring at the regional level that could greatly limit WTCA's effectiveness. One issue is that a few chapters, or individuals within, are for whatever reason, adversarial to WTCA-National. We must all work together to solidify the bond that identifies us as pioneers in the industry, instead of drawing a line in the sand and separating our organization between national and regional. Another issue is chapters viewing themselves as somewhat autonomous.

Assuming this autonomous role at the chapter level simply destroys WTCA's ability to help to protect the interests of all our members. Many of the key regional issues of today have already been templated with successful response tactics. Not taking advantage of the experience gained in previous rounds will surely prove (and we have real examples where it has already proven) to be costly in the future.

WE, THE MEMBERS

As for chapter members, we must also be guarded against handling issues ourselves that are not 100 percent driven by component manufacturers. We face a severe danger and uncertain consequence, when we allow issues to be driven by those with their own agendas. It seriously undermines the strength and voice of the association. We need to develop relationships and team up with those whose beliefs and dreams for the industry are the same as ours. Relationships can and should be win-win. We must foster the culture that will always ask, "How does this action or activity best serve the entire industry? What is the current industry policy on the issue? How can we leverage whatever we are doing to get the very biggest bang for the buck? Does an action in New York affect someone in Nevada?" When one wins, we all win if we always are looking at the bigger picture.

At the July 27th WTCA Open Quarterly (these meetings are open to everyone) meeting there was broad based discussion on the following situations that have been recently encountered by our association:

- Engineering related concerns, like sealed engineering or building officials or professional engineers requesting engineering related information or services, which have taken our industry down the path of scrutiny by State Professional Engineering review boards.
- There have been several times in the past where someone has called our members using the name of WTCA to solicit information on truss technicians or other industry related

- information. They know that by using WTCA they have a better chance to get in the door.
- There has been an increase in the incidence of fire deaths lately being blamed on trusses and reporters looking for information, etc. It is very important to have a sound strategy in place to deal with these issues.
 - Recently, a lumber association representative told a WTCA Chapter member that they had asked WTCA
 - to be involved in a joint marketing activity, but WTCA staff had not expressed interest in being involved, which was not true. In this situation WTCA staff would have welcomed the opportunity to be involved and there could be opportunities that were lost to advance industry interests because of WTCA's lack of involvement.

Upon review of the above the WTCA Board adopted the following:

Due to misinformation in the marketplace, either intentional or otherwise, and as WTCA has acquired a wide array of information, expertise and experience, whenever there is a question that comes up on professional engineering issues, design responsibilities, marketing, product liability, etc., it is to the benefit of the industry and its ability to avoid a costly error, that WTCA is contacted and all industry expertise is brought to bear on resolving the issue positively and proactively. Additionally, whenever WTCA is mentioned by anyone from any organization, no matter how innocent or insignificant the situation may appear to be, it is requested that WTCA be contacted to give WTCA the opportunity to provide perspective on the issue and perhaps to become involved in the successful resolution of the issue if necessary. It is in the structural component manufacturing industry's best interest to ensure that there is very good communication between all members, chapters and WTCA to avoid costly errors and maximize opportunities.

Again I ask, "What's going on?" Are we all going to pull the rope in the same direction, or are we going to let it slide? I am certain that you know what I would like to see happen over the next few years. Since I have seen this issue now from a staff perspective I have even more passion for this as I see our industry missing opportunities to be much stronger and more effective than we are today. My personal goal is to help us achieve a far stronger component manufacturing industry, as we truly are the only organization that is run by component manufacturers specifically for the betterment of all component manufacturers.

Responsibilities of WTCA's Board of Directors

Summarized from Boards that *Make a Difference*, John Carver (emphasis added)

1. Personally hold and support the VISION of the organization.
2. Explicitly address fundamental ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES.
(The essence of what the organization believes, the relative importance of certain principles, what it stands for, and how it works rather than its words.)

3. Force and view issues from an EXTERNAL FOCUS point of view.
 4. Enable an OUTCOME DRIVEN organizing system.
 5. Separate LARGE ISSUES from small.
 6. Force FORWARD THINKING.
 7. Enable PRODUCTIVITY.
(The Board should lead, not simply react.)
 8. Facilitate DIVERSITY and UNITY.
 9. Define RELATIONSHIPS to relevant constituencies.
 10. Define a common basis for DISCIPLINE.
(Sticking to the Board's responsibilities, being decisive without being impulsive and keeping discussion to the point.)
 11. Delineate the Board's ROLE on the ISSUES.
 12. Determine what INFORMATION is needed.
 13. BALANCE overcontrol and undercontrol.
(The Board must not spend time on the trivial but it should expect staff accountability in managing association affairs.)
 14. Use Board time EFFICIENTLY.
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