

## What Every Leader Should Know to Catalyze Higher Team Performance

In today's complex organizational environments, interdependent teamwork is not just desirable - it's essential. Effective team-based collaboration drives agility, resilience, and adaptability, as well as employee satisfaction, engagement, and morale. This combination is what yields exceptional, consistent results. Yet for many leaders, the challenge of managing the intricate dynamics of teams—on top of their other leadership responsibilities—can be daunting and overwhelming.

Join us on Thursday, September 7, at the **Delta Hotels by Marriott Richmond Downtown**, for a networking reception, lunch, and seminar, "What Every Leader Should Know to Catalyze Higher Team Performance," presented by Kimberley Parsons, CEO of Bamboo Teaming.

The seminar will be both in-person and virtual. Attendees will earn 1.5 CAE credits.

**Register at [vsae.org/calendar](https://vsae.org/calendar).**

**Kimberley Parsons**, CEO of Bamboo Teaming, is passionate about helping leaders develop and deliver on the full power of their leadership, so they can catalyze higher levels of performance and results in their teams. Kimberley is co-director in Georgetown University's Leadership Coaching program and has a BBA and MS in Computer Information Systems.



## Plot the Course: Orient New Members for Success

by VSAE Member Michelle Runge, CAE

When new members join your association, they are looking for something specific—perhaps they want to build professional connections, or gain a mentor, or give back to their industry. No matter the reason, how your association engages new members in their first year is critical to shaping the quality of their member experience. How can you ensure their first impression is a positive one?

### The First Step

To begin a journey to a new destination without a map would be ill advised; similarly, expecting new members to find their niche in your association without guidance can result in confusion at best and dissatisfaction at worst. Set them on the right path with a new member orientation: whether it is an in-person event at your annual conference, a virtual event held multiple times throughout the year, or simply a welcome email with links to important information on your website, that first touch point helps cement the association's relationship with new members. At the American Inns of Court, members join local chapters and are automatically extended member benefits at the national level. To support and encourage chapters' orientation efforts, we created a downloadable new member orientation "program-in-a-box," which includes

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7**  
**Seminar with Lunch**  
Delta Hotels by Marriott  
Richmond Downtown

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11–**  
**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12**  
**CEO & Senior Staff Retreat**  
Kingsmill Resort

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21**  
**NOVA Seminar Series**  
Offices of Family, Career, and  
Community Leaders of America, Inc.  
Reston, VA

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4–**  
**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5**  
**Fall Conference & Expo**  
Hilton Richmond Downtown  
& Greater Richmond  
Convention Center

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2**  
**Seminar with Lunch**  
The Westin Richmond Hotel

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1**  
**Awards Luncheon**  
**& Silent Auction**  
Hilton Richmond Hotel  
& Spa at Short Pump

**VIEW UPCOMING EVENTS AT**  
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# Leadership reflections



Zach Eisenman  
VSAE Dep. Executive Dir.

“...take a step back  
and truly think about  
your association  
and why people are  
involved.”

## Back to Basics: Defining and Communicating Your Value Proposition

Google “association value proposition” and it will return over 55 million results. Look in ASAE’s resource guide and there are hundreds if not thousands of articles on the subject. Value proposition is one of those flashy buzzwords that gets thrown around often, but do we ever actually stop to think about what it means for our own organizations? Do you think your staff members can properly articulate your association’s value proposition? How about your board members? When we think about membership, whether it be retention, recruiting new members, or even keeping core members engaged, we must begin with a discussion on value proposition.

At its most fundamental level, a value proposition is what your organization does, it’s why you exist. It is those unique benefits that your organization offers that help solve your members’ problems. But it is also important to remember that some of those key benefits your organizations offer are abstract and intangible, such as creating a sense of belonging and community. It is this mix of both tangible and intangible benefits that becomes the “secret sauce” of your value proposition.

Whether they are articulating it or not, associations would be wise to keep in mind that your members and perspective members have a common thought when considering the association—what’s in it for me? This isn’t an indictment on your association as much as it is human nature. It is not that people are inherently selfish, but rather it is a logical calculation we all make when considering alternatives. While you may not have direct competition or a competing organization that does what you do, what you are competing for is your members time, dollars, and attention—all finite resources.



Once you’ve gone through the exercise of reassessing and/or clearly defining your value proposition, communication becomes the next big hurdle. A well-defined value proposition does very little if it just hides behind the “Why Join?” tab of your webpage. Ensuring your staff understands and can articulate your value proposition is important—they are the professional staff, it’s their job. But beyond that, I would encourage you all to make sure your membership is educated as well. They are the “tip of the spear” after all, they are the ones out in the field interacting with any number of colleagues, competitors, and vendors on a day-to-day basis as they go about their daily work. Why wouldn’t you give them the tools necessary to help recruit and retain members?

Even with a well-crafted value proposition and a properly informed front line of advocates, many associations still have an uphill battle in attracting and maintaining members. What is important is to take a step back and truly think about your association and why people are involved. What niche do you serve for the membership, the profession, or society at large? Thinking through these high-level questions is a great exercise in crafting your core message to members and prospective members. With the right amount of introspection and strategic thinking, you just might find the secret sauce may not be secret after all.



## INVEST IN YOUR FUTURE!

### Join the Fall CAE Study Group

Registration for the VSAE Fall CAE Study Group is open for members interested in studying for the certified association executive (CAE) exam in December.

Nine sessions are held virtually each Tuesday, from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm starting Tuesday, September 26. There will be no study session on November 21. This is a group facilitated by current CAEs. Candidates who fully participated in a VSAE Study Group have had excellent pass rates. The study group is free for VSAE members and \$175 for non-members. Registration is required.

For more information and to register, visit [vsae.org/cae-study-groups](https://vsae.org/cae-study-groups). If you have any questions, please contact **Chrissy Cannaday** at [chrissy@vsae.org](mailto:chrissy@vsae.org).

The CAE Study Group is sponsored by



### Plot The Course > continued from page 1

a PowerPoint template, handouts about the organization, and a sample orientation agenda that chapters can adapt to their own needs.

Examples of how existing members engage with your association can help new members envision their own future. Collect returning members' testimonials about their first year with the association and incorporate them into your orientation or welcome materials: What did they enjoy most? What do they wish they had known from the outset? What is their top recommendation for how new members should get involved?

### The Path Ahead

The first year with your association shapes a member's experience going forward, so it's important that engagement doesn't stop after the orientation. Establish rapport with new members throughout their first year by way of regular touch points—especially in the first few months—to reinforce your association's value proposition. To reduce workload on staff, take advantage of automation wherever possible. When a new member joins a chapter of the American Inns of Court, chapter leaders add them to our membership database. This

in turn triggers the first of eight emails sent over the course of about three months; each email highlights something different about the association and contains a call to action, encouraging new members to take advantage of their national member benefits.

Just as you could incorporate member testimonials into an orientation, consider how you can engage returning members in welcoming new members. One method we have seen used in our chapters is "new member ambassadors": Each "ambassador" (i.e., a returning member) acts as a point-of-contact that a new member could reach out to with any questions about the member experience, should they want to do so.

A successful member journey—like any journey—begins with the preparation. By welcoming them and reinforcing your association's value proposition throughout a new member's first year, you are setting them on a path to continued engagement and growth.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Michelle Runge, CAE**, is a VSAE member and the Director of Chapter Relations for **American Inns of Court Foundation** in Alexandria, Virginia.

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[vsae.org/ceoretreat](https://vsae.org/ceoretreat)

Everywhere association leaders turn, they face complex issues rife with uncertainty and unclear paths forward. At the 2023 CEO & Senior Staff retreat, association leaders will lean into this dynamic, exploring how they, their boards, and teams can navigate these uncertain times and successfully lead in this moment. Together, participants will:

- ✓ Identify the unique leadership requirements of the moment and how even experienced leaders need to go into a learning mode
- ✓ Explore how insights, strategy, and governance form the critical core of organization agility and resilience
- ✓ Understand how risk isn't just something to mitigate, but how we can embrace it as a critical element of future success



Register at [vsae.org/ceoretreat](https://vsae.org/ceoretreat)



This is Virginia's annual premier event for association executives, professional meeting planners, and others who are involved with holding meetings or events. Interact with representatives from meeting venues and service providers throughout the Commonwealth and beyond in the Exhibit Hall. Enjoy the insights of high-caliber content leaders on a variety of issues affecting the association industry. All while networking with your association peers!

## Schedule

### October 4 (Hilton Richmond Downtown)

- 2:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. Registration Open
- 2:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. Workshop (2.50 CAE)
- 5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Networking Reception

### October 5 (Greater Richmond Convention Center)

- 7:30 a.m. – 2:45 p.m. Registration Open
- 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. Networking Breakfast
- 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Keynote Address (1.00 CAE)
- 10:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Morning Breakout Sessions (1.25 CAE)
- 11:30 a.m. Expo Opens
- 12:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. Attendee Lunch (in Expo Hall)
- 2:00 p.m. Expo Closes
- 2:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. Afternoon Breakout Sessions (1.25 CAE)



Learn more and register at [vsae.org/fall](http://vsae.org/fall)

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- Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge

# How to Support Emerging Leaders

Keeping good people, on staff or among volunteers, means training them up. It also requires looking across an organization and maintaining focus.

Employee retention is still a top-of-mind issue for leaders—it drives many of today’s conversations around DEI, the hybrid workplace, efforts to improve workplace wellness, and more. Ultimately, people want to feel like they belong in an organization, which is why beyond just supporting the day-to-day aspects of work, giving people something to aspire to can help them stick around.

Hence the conversations around developing emerging leaders, and increasing investment in it: A recent report from Future Market Insights, for instance, found that the investments in leadership-development programs will increase nearly 6 percent annually across the next decade.

So what will that look like to be successful?

For one thing, according to a recent Big Think piece by Giovanna Acota, it will be wide-ranging. Though there might be distinctions between among who’s selected for emerging leaders programs, she writes, the process shouldn’t favor particular departments, longevity, or past achievements. “The ideal participant for an emerging leaders program is anyone who has the potential to become an effective leader—from entry-level to tenured employee,” she writes.

Research suggests that an all-inclusive approach to leadership development benefits organizations, primarily because it avoids creating a culture of haves and have-nots. But as Acosta points out, that breadth is just the beginning. To achieve “buy-in and accountability,” she writes, the program needs to have clearly stated goals and benefits. It also needs to provide steady feedback from the mentors and leaders who are running the program, and not abandon them after it’s done.

Perhaps most importantly, the program should make sense for the organization that’s providing it; an off-the-shelf plan will be less



**“The ideal participant for an emerging leaders program is anyone who has the potential to become an effective leader.”**

effective than one that’s tailored for how the association’s culture and its industry operates. “Which general competencies is the program intended to develop? Which role-specific competencies?” Acosta writes. “The answers to these questions should tie back to the organization’s strategic goals so that participants are well aware of the organization’s needs and well-equipped to meet them.”

This isn’t just an issue with staff members—leadership development is a challenge among association volunteers as well. A recent ASAE Foundation report, *A Holistic Approach to Volunteer Management*, found that while volunteer engagement remained remarkably resilient through the pandemic, the effectiveness of the volunteers gets relatively low marks. Volunteering, just like a job, needs to have meaning for the people involved; one of the standards of the report is “commitment to continuous improvement.” And that will be defined by the association understanding what its goals are and communicating them.

Not every staffer is meant for the C-suite; not every volunteer is meant to be a board chair, or even on the board. But all deserve an opportunity to learn on the job, and to feel like they’re part of an organization’s bigger mission. “Investing in the development of new leaders helps them feel acknowledged and respected,” Acosta writes, and “allows them to become more motivated, engaged, and committed.” Wherever your people end up, that’s a worthwhile effort.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Mark Athitakis**, a contributing editor for *Associations Now*, has written on nonprofits, the arts, and leadership for a variety of publications. He is a coauthor of *The Dumbest Moments in Business History* and hopes you never qualify for the sequel.



## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

### An emerging trend in hospitality, no barriers please.

Great Wolf Lodge recognized rather quickly the emerging new demands of planners and organizers alike and realized it was time to get creative. With the rebound in meetings and events, we have reshaped how we work and gather to create memorable lasting moments. The idea is a toolkit of out-of-the-box meeting styles focusing on borderless spaces, seamless technology resources, themed menus bringing in local fare, utilization of outdoor areas, activities in the breaks that stimulate the conversations and teambuilding activities that are built into programming. In the Fall of 2022 Great Wolf Lodge Williamsburg immersed itself in a complete redesign of its Conference Center space from new paint, new carpet, new equipment, new digital, and most importantly *new ideas*.

### We vowed to bring, and deliver, a full event experience.

Oh, and bring your families too. In the months and years following the pandemic it became clear that families grew closer, and that work and life have become more integrated. There has been a recognition that balance is not only necessary, but non-negotiable. A recent article in Meetings Magazine quoted, “There are many reasons associations allow members to bring family along to a meeting or convention, not the least of which is that doing so can boost attendance. For some, it fits with the culture of the association and/or its membership base, so that bringing family along is the only way to go.” Travelling for business doesn’t mean sacrificing family time. In Williamsburg, VA, a destination location, there are several outlets at your fingertips including: historical attractions, backyard rollercoasters, or an 80,000 square foot waterpark in walking distance from your meeting room. It has been referenced frequently that venues with a family element result in higher registration numbers. For attendees who can’t always afford family vacations, these meetings let them tie vacation in with a work trip, which saves money and makes the entire family happy. A 15-year veteran partner of Great Wolf Lodge, Maria Harris with Virginia Osteopathic Medical Association, replied the following, “An ideal family/business location also has to have easy

## GREAT WOLF LODGE



lift and be cost effective,” she says. “You want a top-tier location that families can easily travel to but won’t cost an arm and a leg. Perfect properties have great attractions or pools, are near or on the beach, have activities for families onsite but also great meeting space — preferably off the beaten path and away from the pool. Great Wolf’s Conference Center is separate from the rest of the resort, which is nice. You don’t want people in swimsuits wandering into your meeting space”. Sheryl Chasse with PIAVDC says, “It makes it so much easier for attendees to justify not only attending an event but staying for the whole thing — plus, these families get to know each other which is also pretty neat. But honestly, everyone is strapped for time these days. Great Wolf Lodge provides us the ability to get a large chunk of our attendees staying in the same place under one roof. They really don’t need to go anywhere

else.” In 2023 Great Wolf Lodge Association attendee numbers will double in attendance.

This recent trend amongst planners and attendees alike seems to have staying power. Most associations that include families at meetings derive valuable benefits from doing so, including increased attendance and ongoing commitment to attend year after year. In an age when drawing enough attendees sometimes proves difficult, that is an ROI factor that can make a difference to an association’s bottom line.

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**Emily Walker, CAE**, Vice President of Advocacy for the **Virginia Society of CPAs**, was appointed to the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) National Pipeline Advisory Group.

**Hellebush Consulting, LLC** wishes Caley Crawford best of luck in her new endeavor, nursing school! We welcome to the firm Jamie Maccaroni, Communications and Events Director, and Tamara Ridenour, CFRE, Project Manager.

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