

10 REASONS WHY ASSOCIATIONS ENGAGE PROFESSIONAL INTERIM CEOS

By Robert T. Van Hook, CAE, Transition Management Consulting, Inc., *Association Trends*, 2001

Losing a CEO is difficult, even in the best of circumstances. The organization often is plunged into a period of transition and instability, especially when the executive's departure is abrupt. During such times, organizations may lose their forward momentum, and staff may feel lost and directionless.

Faced with a CEO's departure, an increasing number of associations are choosing to engage professional interim CEOs to provide a bridge between the outgoing and incoming executives. Here are 10 reasons why associations use professional interim CEOs:

1. The departure of the executive was sudden or tumultuous and the board wants to get the organization back on an even keel before bringing on a new executive. The board may use a professional interim CEO to ensure the transition is smooth.
2. The board may feel that the association is in pretty good operational shape, but it would like an outside review of its operations and governance to help refine their executive search.
3. The association may have serious operational problems that need to be stabilized or turned around before the permanent executive is hired, especially if the recruitment process is likely to be long (more than 3 months). The board may elect to engage a professional interim CEO to fix the problems the CEO left behind and pave the way for the new executive.
4. The staff may be in a dysfunctional emotional state due to the sudden departure of the executive. A departing CEO often leaves behind a loyal staff that needs help through the grieving process, which an experienced interim executive can provide.
5. The association may have or anticipate staff unrest (significant vacancies, power struggles, etc.) and want a professional interim CEO to manage a process to get staff issues resolved before the new executive arrives.
6. The association may be in a period of rapid growth or change and wishes to maintain or enhance the momentum of the organization during the search process by engaging an experienced professional association manager to fill the interim slot.
7. The association may have big events that can't wait for the completion of the recruitment process, such as a conference or trade show, a pivotal policy decision, or a merger that requires the experience and skill of a professional association manager.
8. Especially in smaller associations, the association might not have an individual on staff with the experience and skill to manage the organization. In larger associations, the board may have more than one person on staff that might be able to act as interim CEO, and choosing one could disrupt staff relationships.
9. The other staff members that may be qualified to perform the interim CEO job already have full time positions – at least we all hope this is the case. Rather than have an existing staff member try to do two jobs and struggle with both, the board can engage an interim CEO service.
10. The board may wish to allow current staff to apply for the permanent CEO position without bias. Serving as interim CEO may make them seem like "heir apparent," which can heighten the staff member's disappointment if s/he doesn't get the permanent position.