

The Key to Industry Leadership

Industry Leadership has many elements and the complexity is increased when the industry group being led is fragmented, has multiple layers, is structured with vertically integrated functions and has competing needs amongst the membership base. The links and interdependencies between the different industry players are the crucial success factors. Equally important is the understanding and awareness of each other's needs and interests. Get these factors right and the leading body can take the sector to a successful future creating value and mutual benefits for all parts of the industry. This is how best practice industry associations globally achieve excellence. Some of the best leadership practices that are common amongst the high achieving peak bodies include:

- Understand the specific needs of all the key players in the industry and the benefits to them of being a member
- See it as a value chain with mutual goals, e.g. the health and growth of the sector
- Reach out and connect with the community that relies upon the sector
- Monitor and communicate the commercial realities and trends facing members, such as changes in technology and consumer buying habits
- Be the voice and the ears for members
- Have independent people on boards and committees to balance insular thinking
- Develop and nurture strong relationships and alliances with other associations nationally
- Apply integrity to every action and every decision
- Set the example
- Tailor membership categories to individual requirements
- Never forget that it is a PEOPLE business

It is also critically important to provide ethical leadership. Industry leaders must monitor risks such as competitive threats and legal exposure. For example in an industry I used to work within, some of the industry bodies in a well-meaning attempt to share information to assist members, created issues that were accused of being anti-competitive conduct. Sharing pricing and volume information, supplier trading terms and even certain collective bargaining opportunities can be challenged. Self-interest and conflicting objectives can erode effectiveness and in the worst case scenario damage or even destroy the industry.

Industry leadership is about calling everyone to action, setting and communicating the future vision, inspiring others to join and follow, providing easily understood value to members, and bringing opposing or competing parties to agreement achieving synergy, co-operation and teamwork against a common goal. The best industry associations provide such leadership, and the best members are those that understand the benefits of joining and regularly review them, appreciate the challenges and needs of other members, contribute to the overall success and importantly continually self-monitor their contributions and progress.

If the horizon can be seen by industry leaders then they will most certainly want a closer look. Great industry leaders reveal that horizon and then show the way there.

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