Managing Change in a Bar Association

WHERE'S THE FUN IN PLAYING WITH KNIVES IF YOU CAN'T DRAW A LITTLE BLOOD?
It is really not our fault

- Lawyers score much higher than the general public in skepticism, urgency, and abstract reasoning.
- Lawyers have the lowest resilience (bouncing back or dealing with a setback) of any profession.
Case Study #1—Non-Dues Revenue

- Well-respected professor at the local law school runs a state-centric bar review course and wants to sell it to the Indianapolis Bar Association.
Some of the factors considered

**Pro**
- Increase non-dues revenue
- Become more relevant to law students and young lawyers
- Similar to existing line of business (CLE)
- Keep alive a respected local institution
- Low financial risk
- The excitement of doing something different

**Con**
- High reputational risk
- Key differences from CLE
- Existing enterprise in decline
- Competition
- Geography
How Did It Go?

- Leadership and staff embraced
- Initially, law schools and students were skeptical
- As a track record was built, more students saw the value
- Almost 20 years now
  - Survived turnovers in faculty
  - Hired staff
  - Expanding space for a classroom
- Vibrant engagement with law students and young lawyers
Case Study #2—Developing a New Membership Model

- New Membership Director at the American Bar Association develops a new membership model to reverse some disconcerting trends in membership
  - Growth of overall membership but decline in the number of dues paying members
  - Graying of the membership
  - Increase in attrition rates in membership classes previously impervious to decline
- Built on an earlier plan that was never fully implemented
Some of the factors considered

**Pro**
- Increase number of dues paying members
- Become more relevant to law students, young lawyers, solo and small firm practitioners
- Similar to existing model in certain respects
- Low reputational risk
- The excitement of doing something to solve the problem

**Con**
- High financial risk
- Key differences from existing model
- Governance structure
- Complexity in proposed change
- Institutional inertia
- Culture change
How Did It Go?

- Adopted by the Board of Governors and the House of Delegates at 2018 Annual Meeting
- Change in culture within the organization
- Initial implementation date—May 1, 2019
- Staged implementation

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Working Toward A Decision

- Discuss with key internal stakeholders
  - Future officers
  - Staff
- Preliminary research and evaluate feasibility
- Evaluate how it fits within the bar’s mission and articulate the strategy
- Test vote—is it even worth exploring?
- Continue to research and refine the strategy
- Engage with stakeholders and enlist advocates
- Build the business plan
- Evaluate the likelihood of success
- Obtain necessary approvals
- Develop metrics for to measure success
“He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life.”—Muhammad Ali
“Do one thing every day that scares you.” — Eleanor Roosevelt
“Yes, risk-taking is inherently failure-prone. Otherwise, it would be called ‘sure-thing-taking.’” — Jim McMahon
“Nothing will ever be attempted, if all possible objections must be first overcome.” — Samuel Johnson
And Finally…

“There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long range risks of comfortable inaction.”—John F. Kennedy
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