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# **Coping and Managing as a Small Staff Executive**

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## **Description:**

By virtue of its size, managing a small staff association can be a high-wire circus act for any executive. If you're walking this tightrope on a daily basis, join your colleagues in this open and candid session. A panel of small staff executives will share their experiences, challenges, and successes on a variety of topics, and will follow with an open forum to answer your specific questions. Leave with at least **50 vital tips** to help you be successful under the big top of small-staff management.

## **How do we leverage:**

- Limited **time** to get more....
  - Existing **people** to get more....
  - Existing **money** to get more....
  - Outside **experts** to get more....
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## **Time Tips:** How do we leverage limited **time** to get more....

1. **Prioritize** – use a “triage method”.
2. **Member contacts** - focus on giving your time to the appropriate contacts for your level of involvement. Interact with your Board and Executive-level members; let your staff or others interact with individual members.
3. **Delegation** - delegate/outsource tasks based on the time implications of the task, not the personal attractiveness or unattractiveness of the task. Also consider.... breaking a large project into small pieces and analyze the smaller chunks for outsourcing/delegating possibilities. Even if you can't hand off any of the smaller pieces, the project won't appear as daunting (e.g., how do you eat an elephant).
4. **Schedule** - try to set your schedule so that you can work an hour or two a day when the office is less busy. Either early or late. Amazing how much you can accomplish without the phone ringing. This approach is often helpful when working on a **big projects**.
5. **Reading** - save the less important items you receive, but want to read, for when you are on an airplane or commuting on public transit.
6. **Life balance** - do work while you are at work. Don't do personal tasks. Don't do work at home.
7. **Health** - stay healthy, so you don't have to miss work.
8. **Emails** - turn off the audio alert for incoming emails – less temptation to keep checking email when you really need to focus your attention on completing a particular task.
9. **Big Project that aren't getting done** - if you aren't getting to a particular project that needs to be completed, step back and analyze why? Do you need to come up with a different approach to handling the project? Is it something that the organization really needs at this time? Sometimes our subconscious is trying to tell us something that we need to pay attention to.
10. **Project management** – while we all talk about time management – sometimes you might need to finish that one project before you start another one. Not always easy.

**People Tips:** How do we leverage existing **people** to get more....

11. **Time off** - use compensation other than salary to motivate and retain. Extra paid days off work, as well as (or often better than) salary increases in tough times.
12. **Lunch** - buy someone lunch once in a while and shoot the breeze with them. Amazing what it can do for morale. Also, find out what they may be interested in that currently is not part of their job. Are these interests something that you do that they can assume responsibility for that would increase their job satisfaction and yours?
13. **New challenges** - let people try new tasks or take on new challenges. Don't pigeon-hole based on job title.
14. **The benefit value** - focus benefits on items that actually mean something and have value. Don't add extraneous garbage benefits (your members will see through it).
15. **Set the ground rules and then get out of the way** - make sure everyone knows the most important part of their job and that they take responsibility for it. Establish rules and then let individuals operate independently. Don't micromanage.
16. **Equality** - Be fair. Treat everyone equal. Don't promote a diva atmosphere.
17. **Staff meetings** - even if you only have 1.5 employees, schedule regular staff meetings to discuss issues. I have been amazed what comes out through the course of these meetings.
18. **Problem resolution** - challenge your team to come up with solutions to problems before they approach you. This empowers them and brings more options to the table for a well informed mutual decision.
19. **Training opportunities** - at least annually, talk about training opportunities for your team. There are a myriad of inexpensive courses that are offered in any business locale. Asking your employees which one they may want to take and sending them (along with lunch) can re-energize them. Be sure to ask them to share the 3-5 "pearls" they learned that may help the organization.
20. **Use volunteers** - put a call out to local members for volunteering to work on a particular project. If the project is broken down into small chunks (see time tips above), you may be surprised at the level of interest members have in seeing the office, working alongside you and really feeling like they contributed to a particular project. Be sure to provide recognition of their efforts!
21. **Use member resources** - employees, communication tools, industry partners, etc to expand association resources. Don't under estimate that you may have a handful of members who would be excited to lend you their resources to help meet an industry goal.

**Money Tips:** How do we leverage existing money to get more....

22. **Vendor bidding** - discourage open competitive bidding between known vendors. Use consistent vendors for important tasks. Saves lots of \$\$\$ when things go wrong. Can get you good deals from old friends.
23. **Vendor relationships** - focus on the individual not the organization when working with an outside vendor. If that person leaves the vendor to strike out on their own, you can often save a lot of money during their start-up.
24. **Print vs. electronic** - create print versions of documents only when absolutely necessary. Use the internet to your advantage.
25. **Virtual documents (see previous tip)** - create one version of a document for use by all audiences. With the internet everyone can access it, so why make target audience documents?
26. **Conference call systems** - take full advantage of internet-based and inexpensive conference call systems. Don't pay the big guys their fees.
27. **Email** - use email like a miser to save money. Don't get handcuffed by people who won't use it. As permitted by state law, change your by-laws to permit electronic distribution of meeting documents and announcements.
28. **In-kind contributions** - examine your budget for potential "in-kind" contributions from your members. Example: if you have corporate members that have printing facilities, consider asking them to contribute by printing that new brochure or your organizational stationary. One of my members who worked on our annual auction wanted to upgrade the process and purchased a charity auction software package that she used to work on the next year's auction and donated it to our organization.
29. **Contract renewals** - when annual contracts come up with your vendors (e.g., accountant, etc.), ask them to sharpen their pencil to try decrease or, at a minimum, to maintain the same fees instead of just accepting an increase. Today's economy merits a hard look at any increases. This applies to phone contracts as well.
30. **Networking** - subscribe to the ASAE listserv for several functions (not just the small association or CEO). There are many cost-saving tips that come up in a variety of areas.
31. **Technology** - stay on top of technology. Look for ways to save \$\$\$ (cloud-based environment, online conferencing vs. face-to-face, google voice, etc).
32. **Sponsors** - find unique sponsor opportunities. Think outside the box – sometimes the best sponsorship opportunities are those that are developed with starting with a blank sheet of paper and asking your member their interests.
33. **Don't reinvent the wheel** - beg and borrow ideas.

**Outside Expert Tips:** How do we leverage outside experts to get more....

34. **Empower volunteers** – volunteers are often outstanding resources.
35. **Ego** - feed their ego. Regardless of who does the work, always give the member/expert the credit.
36. **Big Picture** - ensure these experts (consultants, speakers, members, etc.) understand the bigger picture of your organization and mission and foster a partnership with them. The more invested they are with your organization, the more they will foster valuable linkages and alliances, contribute great advice and help in innumerable ways. For example, one of our accountants was so interested in our mission and organization that she took vacation time and spent her own money to participate in our annual meeting and donated valuable assistance with our Board meeting and auction.
37. **Referrals** - refer these experts, consultants to other organizations or companies. They generally are quite appreciative and are more likely to offer additional services/advice than what you are billed for.
38. **Consultants for you too** - After serving as ED for 15 years, I felt the need for an outside expert to help me sharpen my skills and strategic focus. So I tried the coaching session at ASAE and hired a career coach who is serving as a valuable sounding board and thinking partner. She is helping me sort through the detritus of the years and has helped reenergize me and become a better ED with a more balanced life.
39. **ASAE** – utilize the floor of the ASAE annual meeting to locate vendors to meet your association needs. Support the vendors that support the industry.
40. **Local Universities** – expand your network to include professors from local universities, community colleges, etc. Many professors are looking for contract work and/or may have some students who can participate on a project.

## **Other Tips:** What it takes to be a small staff exec!

41. **Be fearless & be comfortable with yourself** – don't look back in regret and don't fear the negative consequences of proper actions that you take. Be confident. Don't attempt to be all things to all people. Know what you can do and what you need help to accomplish and don't be afraid to ask for it. Put your heart and soul into everything you do and then when something is done, put it in the past.
42. **Be consistent in your actions and attitudes** – set the example for others. Show up every day. Demand the same from others. Follow the rules you have set for others.
43. **Be patient** – be the turtle not the hare. Don't rush to judgment.
44. **Be mysterious and a bit aloof** – be friendly but not friends with the members. Don't play favorites and don't make fools into enemies.
45. **Be yourself** – you can't be who you succeeded, so don't try.
46. **Be willing to learn everything** you can about the issues you represent. Become an expert.
47. **Be an excellent multi-tasker** while keeping your eye on the larger picture.
48. **Get to know the people** with whom you work, your members and others and find out what their drivers and motivations are. Then use that information to link their motivations to elements of the job at hand. Dr. Robert Hartman who developed the Hartman-Kinsel Profile used in HR, professional coaching, etc., said that in general people hold back a significant portion of their cooperation and productivity until they feel valued as human beings; on average up to 40% of their total capacity. That's a lot of time, innovation, potential sources of funding, etc. that you can put to great use.
49. **Leverage leverage leverage.** Shift your mindset to look at how to connect people, tasks, time, money, outside experts, etc. It's like a puzzle that you, as ED, are uniquely able to complete by putting the different pieces together to improve the whole.
50. **Be versatile.**
51. **Have tenacity**
52. **Take on a sense of ownership**
53. **Have no ego** - you have to be ready to take out the trash and make the coffee Accessibility A little entrepreneurial spirit