



From the President

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What We Are Lacking: Urgency, Revenue Resources, Interpreter Certification

Last time we reviewed

our strengths: the Annual Conference, the Association’s size, and Headquarters. Let us now look at the weaknesses identified by the Board during the January Planning Day. As with the strengths, individual Board members selected from a list of weaknesses identified during a brainstorming session the three items that they considered to be the most important. Here is the full list with the number of votes for each weakness in parentheses: inertia/complacency (9); few revenue resources (8); no interpreter certification (5); lack of financial support from major players (5); apathy (4); not enough voting participation (3); certification (2); divisions (2); cost of the conference (2); legislative isolation (2); chapters (2); and size (1).

It is interesting to note that many of our weaknesses are also our strengths. The Association’s size was identified as our major strength, yet it also appeared on the list of weaknesses because it necessitates a certain level of bureaucracy and makes our Association less flexible. Similarly, chapters and divisions were listed both as strengths and weaknesses, because Board members felt that while they serve a very important function for our members, divisions also present governance challenges that need to be addressed. Finally, ATA’s Certification Program was also identified as both a strength and a weakness, because while it is arguably the best certification program for translators in the U.S., there is still room for improvement; most importantly, it does not serve the needs of our interpreters and other language professionals.

Inertia and complacency were identified as our greatest weaknesses. A lack of new initiatives, apathy, and resistance to change are the all-too-familiar symptoms of what can be summarized as a lack of urgency. This is really a governance issue that needs to be addressed at the Board level. Going beyond its fiduciary responsibilities, the Board must ask some hard and fundamental ques-

industry (the lack thereof was also identified as a weakness).

The fact that we do not offer certification for interpreters was also identified as a major weakness. More than one half of the Association’s members offer interpreting services, and it is a matter of common sense that certification should be available to them. This weakness is being actively addressed

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tions and engage in “generative” thinking and governing. Generative thinking produces a sense of what a given piece of information means by reframing it and looking at it from different perspectives; it also facilitates generative governing, which produces—or generates—new approaches to existing problems.

Another major weakness of our Association is that our revenues come from few resources. The Association’s main revenue sources are membership dues, advertising, the Annual Conference, and the Certification Program; the last two also have significant costs offsetting the revenue. This weakness can be overcome by exploring the pool of available resources such as grants, revenue-producing services or products, and financial support from major players within and outside our

by an ad hoc committee chaired by ATA Secretary Virginia Perez-Santalla, herself an accomplished interpreter. Given the wide spectrum of settings and domains in which interpreters work and the number of private and government certification programs already in existence, this effort is not without significant challenges, not to mention the high cost of developing such a program.

Weaknesses are internal to our organization, which means that we have control over them. The Board made the first and the most important step in identifying them; it is now up to all of us to reduce or eliminate them. Do you have an idea, suggestion, or recommendation based on your experience? Let the Board know. We are listening.

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