

Living the Association's Values

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Boards frequently adopt values. Values are the guiding principles that are intended to frame discussions, decisions and events.

Often the process of adoption is only a perfunctory step in strategic planning; like updating the mission or adding a vision. Once adopted the values remain buried in the strategic plan report.

They are seldom referenced at board meetings. If you ask a board if it has values, the room may go silent.

After adopting any part of the association "brand platform" the elements should be purposely integrated. The brand platform or member promise is composed of the mission, vision and values.

Purposeful Integration

Meet the San Diego County Bar Association.

I describe it with one word – DYNAMIC. The word is a noun: "a force that stimulates change or progress within a system or process." That describes the intent of nearly every association.

The leadership and staff live the values they have adopted. It should be noted they reference the staff as the "internal team" rather than the administrators, managers and executives. This reflects their culture of respect and inclusion.

The association engages members through 50 unique sections, committees and divisions. There are nearly 10,000 members. It's a high-energy association producing results, relevance and celebrating successes.

Updating the Bar Mission

In 2018 board revised the mission statement to reflect who they have become. The Bar was founded 119 years ago in 1899.



It a different kind of mission statement. Not like the longer versions promoting heritage and describing the association. Nor like shorter versions that can be tweeted but don't say enough to distinguish one organization from another.

It took the courage of the leadership to draft a statement that defines them and their relationship to their members:

“Inclusion and community define us. Innovation and leadership propel us. Your growth motivates us. Celebrating you and the profession *is* us.”

The revised mission is aggressively promoted to keep the bar, bench and local community aware and engaged.

Guiding Principles

The board also adopted guiding principles. These values should influence discussions, decisions and actions.

- ✓ Community
- ✓ Inclusion
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Growth
- ✓ Celebration

They are strategically promoted for member and community awareness, including customization of a set of Duplo building blocks to rest on desks and the board table. The principles are promoted on six foot pop-up banners and promotional materials.

From an outsider perspective, I might define the values as:

Community – The Bar is a dynamic community supporting the legal profession; and the Bar is integral in giving back to the communities in which they serve.

Inclusion – There are all types of practitioners and practice settings to embrace and respect.

Leadership – Without authentic leadership by the entire team, little will be accomplished.

Growth – Sustainable growth of the Bar, membership, resources and leadership; a plan for the future.

Celebration – Have fun and recognize our members and achievements along the way.

Integrating Mission and Values

The Bar integrates the enhanced mission and values into all aspects of their programs, governance, and management. Awareness encourages the leadership to frequently ask, “Are we living our values on behalf of our members?”

Every association wants to be *dynamic*: a force that stimulates change or progress within their profession, trade or community.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.