

There we were all dancing away on the ship's deck and BAM – next thing we know we're all scrambling for the lifeboats. As captain of the Titanic, what will you do?

- 1.) **Get in your members' heads.** What are they going through right now? I know this is different for every association, but many of us saw businesses we spent years building disappear overnight. You may have members who are on the front lines fighting this thing. You have to figure out what they need right now. I don't need a webinar on travel insurance or how to pack for my next trip, I need a life preserver. What do your members need right now? Help? Hope?
- 2.) **Repurpose the right content.** I'm a member of 5 associations and the best information I've gotten is from Inc. Magazine and the US Chamber of Commerce's weekly National Small Business Town Hall. It's a great model for a well done, content driven, highly professional webinar. If your members are businesspeople – watch it and summarize it for them. I'd rather not spend the hour watching it, although it's great. Maybe your members don't have time to watch it. Use the content and look like a Rockstar. Don't just give them a link to the SBA, tell them what they need to know. If I'm drowning, I'd rather have you give me a broken board, then attend a conference on shipbuilding. Don't make this harder than it has to be.
- 3.) **Be careful with renewals.** I know you need money. I get that your conferences have been canceled or postponed (believe me, I know). Alan Skipper, former AENC President and VP at the NC Medical Society, said on a recent AENC Huddle that they were waiting to ask for renewals, which I think is great. MPI contacted me (my membership expires at the end of April) and said they were giving all members a 60-day grace period. We could still access all benefits during this challenging time. The National Speakers Association (of which I've been a member for almost 20 years) just sent me a bill. This is what it said:

Hi Denise D. Ryan, (nice, personal touch, eh?)

We're getting closer and closer to your NSA Birthday! The speaking world is busy, so we wanted to send you a quick reminder that your membership is up for renewal on 4/30/2020.

The speaking world is busy? This is clearly autogenerated, but it's the most tone-deaf communication I've gotten. No empathy at all. I don't mind being billed, but this is way too flippant. I am actually reconsidering my membership. Not just because of this, but because I need my association more than ever, and they are up on the deck encouraging the band to play while I'm freezing in the ocean.

- 4.) **But beware free.** I am all for free resources right now. The Town Hall program I mentioned is free. Putting up free resources is a great idea. But I'm seeing two things I think are not good:

- 1.) Free things that are a thinly guised sales pitch

I attended a webinar titled "How Not to Die in a Pandemic" (great title I know!). It was two hours long (ugh!) and 90 minutes into it, we finally got to the meat which turned out to be a few tips we've all heard and a book pitch. This is not the only time this has happened to me. I know we all need to make money, but don't trick me.

2) The danger of setting a precedent

Everyone, their brother and their red-headed stepchildren are putting up webinars. I attended a whole virtual conference that was free. LinkedIn has opened some of its courses for free. A lot of these are terrible, some are great. Here's the problem – now I think all this should always be free. Why pay \$395 for a virtual conference if I just attended one for free?

Just be strategic with what you offer free – this is a great time to use staff to give updates or members to share best practices.

There has never been a time that associations were more important. This is the scariest, most confusing thing that has ever happened to many of us. We are looking to our associations for information, for help, for community, and most importantly, for hope.

I can't wait till we get all our lifeboats back to port and can sit at the bar together swapping stories about the journey.

Godspeed, captain!

By Denise Ryan, MBA, CSP and long-time AENC member

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