

# IMPACT

Michigan Society of Association Executives | March/April 2010 | Vol. 27, No. 2

## CAPTAIN STRATEGY

### How to Link People to Operations

**Plus:**  
*Lessons from  
The Blind  
Visionary*

**Re-Evaluating Your  
Political Goals**

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# Lessons from *The Blind Visionary*

A new book and the topic of an ORGPRO keynote presentation captures the importance of finding mentors and reaching out for help.

by **Doug Eadie**

The new book, *The Blind Visionary* ([www.TheBlindVisionary.com](http://www.TheBlindVisionary.com)), describes Virginia Jacko's incredible odyssey. It starts at Purdue University, where Virginia, then a senior financial executive, gradually loses her eyesight and manages to continue carrying out her demanding responsibilities for several years as the darkness descends. Virginia's journey takes her to the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, where she starts all over as a vocational rehabilitation student. Unbelievably, four years later, Virginia becomes the Lighthouse's president and CEO. On her watch, Lighthouse revenues have more than doubled, and several new programs have been successfully launched.

Part Three of *The Blind Visionary*, "Lessons to Share," draws on Virginia's amazing journey in providing practical guidance that readers can put to use to capitalize on opportunities and overcome obstacles in their professional and personal lives. One of her most important lessons is: Reach Out Aggressively! In the following excerpt from *The Blind Visionary*, Virginia talks about reaching out in her role as president and CEO of the Miami Lighthouse.

## Virginia Jacko: On Reaching Out

There's absolutely no question that one of the big reasons why I've been successful as CEO of the Lighthouse is that I've been willing to call on outside help when I've thought I needed it. Even if I knew every last thing I needed to know to be a successful CEO — and you'd better believe I don't — I

wouldn't have the time to accomplish all of the things that need to be done.

Take, for instance, the need to help Lighthouse staff understand the importance of thinking more like entrepreneurs than traditional social workers — thinking about innovative ways to tap new resource streams and not just rely on the same old government programs. We've made lots of progress in becoming what people these days call "social entrepreneurs," but I couldn't have begun to change the traditional social work mentality by myself.

I hired a consultant, in this case the



*The Blind Visionary* (Governance Edge Publishers 2010) is available at [www.msae.org](http://www.msae.org). Bring it to ORGPRO 2010 to have the author, Doug Eadie, sign your copy.

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FEATURE

**Interested  
in More Lessons  
from *The Blind Visionary*?**

Doug Eadie will share more lessons from *The Blind Visionary* at a breakfast keynote address during ORGPRO 2010. Save the dates for July 12-14, 2010.

former CEO of a major blind services agency, who had a PhD in nursing.

She's a sharp, sharp woman who understands that the Lighthouse has to become a social enterprise, not just an old-time agency, if we hope to grow in the future. And, she's met with my key managers to help them understand the need to change how we think about our work at the Lighthouse.

Governance is another area where I couldn't have accomplished our essential modernization of the Lighthouse board's committee structure without the help of a consultant with years of hands-on experience in working with nonprofit boards, and equally important, the credibility of an outside

expert the board would take seriously. To bring on a consultant involved some risk because some board members might have said, "Who the heck do you think you are telling us that we need help? We think we're just fine.

The problem is yours." But any self-respecting CEO has to be willing to take the risk and be able to say, "This is the right thing to do, and I'm willing to go out on the limb to get it done."

I've already said that I couldn't have succeeded as CEO without serious development of my board as a governing body. Even thinking about having to run around working with the 12 different board committees I inherited gives me the chills. So bringing in a consultant was a no-brainer, but it still took a bit of courage on my part.

Finding mentors and really paying attention to what they have to teach

is a low-cost/high-yield strategy that I recommend to everyone, no matter what they're engaged in. Of course, using mentors requires choosing the right teachers and taking the time to learn, but it still doesn't cost you any money. I've been on the lookout for mentors since my earliest days at Purdue, and it's really paid off. There's only so much you can learn from books or in classrooms. Some of the most valuable knowledge I've acquired over the years has come from watching and listening.

When I have to handle a situation as a CEO, I often think about the former president of Purdue, Steven Beering, who's now chairman of the National Science Board of the National Science Foundation. I've said to myself more than once, "How would Steven Beering handle this?" I

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WI-FI OUTLETS

# Plan now to Become A BOARD SAVVY CEO

Drawing on his work with more than 500 nonprofit and public organizations of all kinds over the past 25 years and on his 18 books, including *Meeting the Governing Challenge* (Governance Edge Publishers), Doug Eadie will provide MSAE member chief staff executives (CSEs) with detailed, practical information on putting his *High-Impact Governing Model* to work. This workshop will take place July 13, 2010 during ORGPRO at the Eagle Crest Resort in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Association CSEs face unique demands and have distinct professional needs. To assist CSEs with these challenges, MSAE has offered programs specifically targeted to them featuring the newest content and trends. This year's program is geared to helping the CSE lead and manage change and govern through a strong board.

Participants will learn how to produce four high-stakes outcomes over the long run in their associations:

- Effective strategies for dealing with the highest-priority strategic and operational issues facing their associations;
- Their boards' strong ownership of its governing work;
- A board-CEO partnership that is close, productive, and enduring;
- Their board's management of, and accountability for, its own governing performance.

Eadie will cover key features of his *High-Impact Governing Model*, including:

- Characteristics of a "board-savvy" CEO;
- Clarification of the board's governing role and detailed governing functions;
- Use of well-designed standing committees as governing engines;

- The board's management of its own governing performance.

Founder and CEO of Doug Eadie & Company, a Tampa Bay firm specializing in building high-impact board-CEO partnerships, Doug Eadie has assisted nonprofit and public organizations in applying his *High-Impact Governing Model* in diverse fields such as association management, education, economic development, transportation, health care, aging, and social services. Eadie's *High-Impact Governing Model* is described in several of his 18 books, including his best-selling *Meeting the Governing Challenge*, *Extraordinary Board Leadership* (second edition), and *Building a Rock-Solid Partnership With your Board*.

Eadie is the author of more than 100 articles that have appeared in national magazines and journals, including ASAE's *Associations Now* and he writes a regular column on nonprofit and public governance for three national publications.

MSAE is honored to be working with Doug Eadie this year for the one-day program featuring a strategic day of dialogue on his *High-Impact Governing Model*. This program is sure to help executives with the "business" of being a CSE. In addition, it will help the executive go beyond mastering the details of the business of the organization to examining how to diversify and enrich leadership goals, skills, and attributes.

Let MSAE help you become a master of the change game, ready to meet the tremendous challenges facing the organization you lead in today's unprecedented environment. ♦

For more information on MSAE's CSE Conference, visit [www.orgpro.info](http://www.orgpro.info).



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think of times like when he went up to Indianapolis with a Purdue delegation to present something they wanted the legislature to act on, and they didn't get what they wanted. After they got back to Purdue, I dropped by the office of the vice president for state relations

and his team and said, "Hey, how did everything go yesterday?" And they responded with something like, "Oh, it didn't go very well." Then I went to see the president and asked how things had gone the day before. He responded with something like, "You know, we're going to get them to go along next year. We planted the seed, and we're going

to get it next year." Steven Beering taught me a wonderful lesson about not only thinking positively, but also about persevering, not giving up just because things don't go your way in a particular instance.

My Lighthouse board members aren't just stakeholders that I've got to manage a relationship with; they're also my trusted colleagues and teachers. Sure, they're my boss, but I think of them as a huge asset — a tremendous collection of knowledge and expertise that they can share with me on an as-needed basis.

Take my current board chairman, Owen Freed. He was a very active leader in Rotary in Miami and had been a district governor. We got to know each other when the Lighthouse honored the Miami Rotary Club at its 75th anniversary gala in 2006. Since he's become chairman of the Lighthouse board, he's become a trusted advisor and teacher, and it's great that his office is nearby. He likes to pick up the phone and ask me how things are going, and there've been a few times I've had to say, "Owen, I think we've got an issue here that I'd like to bounce off you." By the way, I don't for an instant worry about maybe seeming weak because I'm asking for help; I can't worry about trivial ego things like that. I'd much rather have Owen's or some other board member's best thinking on an issue, than try to make them think I'm always in command and never need help. ♦

*Doug Eadie is president and CEO of Doug Eadie & Company, Inc. and can be reached at [doug@dougeadie.com](mailto:doug@dougeadie.com).*

*Virginia Jacko is president & CEO of the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired and can be reached at [vjacko@miamilighthouse.org](mailto:vjacko@miamilighthouse.org).*

## Think... IT Support Think... i2 Integration

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*Maureen E. Conner, Ph.D.  
Executive Director, JERITT Project  
Director, Judicial Administration (JA) Program*

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