

## **Associations are Made for Times Like These**

Bob Harris, CAE and Kateryna Glazkova

As the economy was faltering and associations began hurting, Ukrainian executive Kateryna Glazkova circulated a statement, “Associations are made for times like these.”

Kateryna is the executive director of the Union of Ukrainian Entrepreneurs, founded in 2016. Its purpose is to protect the interests of entrepreneurs and create a favorable business environment. UUE uses the acronym SUP in Ukrainian language.

*“...associations have proven to be resilient through wars, politics, recessions, depressions and pandemics.”*

We discussed the impact of her statement. I agree, associations have proven to be resilient through wars, politics, recessions, depressions and pandemics.

We shared what characteristics make associations strong.

**Collaborative** – Associations build partnerships to solve problems. SUP organized a union of regional and professional business associations, named COVID-19 Business Task Force. The purpose of the initiative is to analyze problems and increase influence.

**Member Care** – In troubled times especially, members need support. We should be positioned as their indispensable partner. Listening to members, we have created new products and services. SUP launched a hotline so entrepreneurs can get advice on government lockdown and legislative changes.

**Strategic** – Association boards and staff are strategic, realizing the need to stay out of the weeds and avoid tactics. Plans have been made during the pandemic that reflect urgent and short-term goals. It is often said, an idea without a plan is simply a dream.

**Advocacy** – An association best knows the issues of their members. SUP knows the pandemic will end, lockdown will stop, and entrepreneurs will face new conditions. We are preparing proposals for the authorities addressing reforms needed to restart the economy.

**Leadership** – Few organizations have assembled the depth of leadership found in an association. From emerging leaders to past presidents, they step up and champion the cause when called upon.

**Convenor** – Many organizations are seeking answers to the same questions. Associations provide trusted platforms where others can share news and projects.

**Adept** – An association has two distinct workforces. Volunteers govern, while the staff manage. The board develops governance finesse through orientation. Continuous training is the cornerstone of performance excellence for staff.

**Transparency** - Clear communications with state authorities, entrepreneurs and the media are a priority. We inform the government of the mood and problems of business, explain to the media the real situation, we tell members the most important news about coronavirus and how we are addressing the problem. SUP issues the *Coronavirus Business Digest* to advise entrepreneurs of progress and victories.

**Empathy** – Associations maintain close relations with members and understand their challenges. It requires flexibility. For members unable to pay dues, be ready to extend the deadline or offer waivers.

**Holistic** – While associations serve their members, they impact the community, economy and jobs. Associations are positioned to see the big picture and to work for the benefit of all.

**Innovative** – Associations are innovative, using leverage, expertise and experience to find solutions.

**Resourceful** – Associations are able to develop sustainable streams of income. It requires the work of committees and staff to monetize programs and deliver value. Diversity in income streams is critical.

**Passionate** – People are drawn to an association because they share a passion. It is rare to find such passion in any other type of organization. Volunteers dedicate time and energy; staff are known to work hard.

**Visionary** – Whether a new or seasoned organization, participants develop and communicate a clear vision. This vision is often the fuel for hard work.

Few organizations have this combination of characteristics to survive a crisis and sustain the association.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at [www.nonprofitcenter.com](http://www.nonprofitcenter.com). Kateryna Glazkova is the executive director of the Union of Ukrainian Entrepreneurs (SUP), in Kiev.

