

Sometimes it's scary!

I remember my first Club Managers Association of America conference like it was yesterday. It was in Nashville, Tennessee in the early nineties. Just arriving at the hotel for my conference was a little intimidating. The Opryland Hotel was bigger than any hotel I had ever been in before. The CMAA Conference was bigger than any event I had ever attended. I was relatively new in my club management career and was beginning to meet some very accomplished club management professionals from some very impressive clubs.

I remember meeting one manager who told me how wonderful he was. According to him his club was very lucky to have him. I arrived at the conference with some idea of how little I knew about club management and met someone who was pretty sure he knew it all. Although I didn't know him he felt compelled to tell me how much he earned. His salary was over four times higher than mine.

At that conference I had so much joy. It was like I was waking up. The education was amazing for me. I met some people who are among my closest friends to this day. It was at that conference that my friendship with Joe Charbonneau began. I experienced events on a scale that inspired me to give my club more than it had experienced before. I even made my singing debut in Nashville. Two gigs to very friendly and gracious audiences and my career was over. It was a special time.

But if I am honest with myself, mixed in with all of the jubilation and wonderful feelings was this feeling of worry and fear. I wondered if I was in over my head. Could the things I don't know jump up to bite me? Was mine the only board with a few crazy characters that had no regard for rules or common sense? Did my colleague from a local club, who said I wouldn't last six months, know what he was talking about? How did I measure up to all of these club managers I met who had it all together and had nothing to fear?

I learned many things at that conference, but perhaps an unstated lesson that I was picking up was that part of being a club manager is learning to act like everything was under control, be very careful with honesty and especially vulnerability.

That was February of 1993. A lot has changed since then. For one thing I am 18 years older now. I gained much more experience as a club manager and then when I became a coach I began to speak to a lot of club managers. Even from the beginning, I was attracted to the people that were at the top of their game. I wanted to learn from them and possibly have a little of them rub off on me.

This is what I have learned!

Being an inexperienced manager vs. a seasoned manager, being a non CCM vs. a CCM, being from a smaller unknown club vs. a large prestigious one, being an unrecognized leader vs. a celebrated one **does not give you the exclusive rights to fear and worry.**

The message for all of us is that **we are not alone**. I can tell you that in the beginning, before I built relationships of trust with other managers, it sure felt like I was alone. I can think of a private conversation I had with a highly respected industry leader one time. When he described a challenge he was having with his board, he was describing the challenge I was having with mine. It was incredibly liberating to hear that my situation wasn't all that special. I could understand how the board could question my experience and judgment, but the fact that a board could have the same concerns with him considering his experience and judgment was an eye opener.

Another lesson I have learned is that beyond not feeling like you are alone in a problem, it is important to **not be alone in a problem**. There are kinds of **support** you can utilize to move past a problem, and a reluctance to do so only keeps you in it longer. As a coach I would suggest that dealing with a problem gives you the opportunity to **focus your efforts on your goals**. When our focus is taken from our goals, we lose and the organization does on some level as well.

This year at conference Shelley MacDougall and I did a group coaching session. At the beginning we asked each person to let us know what they would like to get out of the session. The first person to speak was a member of the national board. He said "I would like to know how to deal with my fears." The other people in the group either thanked him for letting them know they were not alone or crazy to have some fears, or they agreed that they shared the director's goal for the hour.

One of the most powerful lessons I have learned over the past 18 years flies in the face of what I thought I learned at my first conference. It seemed to me then that showing any sign of vulnerability was a sign of weakness. It seemed that we shouldn't show our boards, our members, our staff, our friends, or our families that we didn't have it all together. It was as if doing so would unravel our credibility.

After years of working with leaders and many of the top people in an industry, and quite frankly working on myself, I have learned that **vulnerability can also be a great illustration of strength**. There is no doubt that you need to be able to trust those you are being vulnerable with, but being vulnerable is an illustration of integrity and authenticity.

My challenges for you are **don't be alone, move your focus to your goals, get support and find an environment where you can show strength in vulnerability!**