
 Forwarded Message:

Subj:	The World is Flat
Date:	3/7/2006 9:46:01 PM Eastern Standard Time
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<i>Sent from the Internet (Details)</i>	

Hello fellow NSP leaders,

Readers familiar with Thomas Friedman's latest book will immediately identify with this concept - that the *world has become flat*. We now live in an information age, very different than our world of even twenty years ago. Says Friedman, "Several technological and political forces have converged, and that has produced a global, Web-enabled playing field that allows for multiple forms of collaboration without regard to geography or distance - or soon, even language."

One recurring theme (on the Forum and patroller committee website) is a somewhat myopic view of the world, namely that NSP exists and was formed to serve members; despite contrary evidence from the often revered, and often misquoted, Minot Dole.

In the Annual Report of the National Ski Patrol 1939-1940, the origins of the NSP are clearly described. The NSP actually begins life being proposed and supported by the National Ski Association (predecessor to NSAA) for the purpose of forming more patrols, raising the standards of membership requirements, working to advance the sport and develop skiing safety, and making more information available for patrols. These tenets are essentially echoed in the Charter. Nowhere does it state that NSP was formed to make members the central reason for NSP, in fact, quite the opposite! The NSP was formed to serve customers, not members.

Furthermore, in the aforementioned Report, the "Division Chairs" were asked to register members for the purpose of communication and states the principle existence of National Ski Patrol is to develop new ideas and distribute information. If the principle reason of NSP is to develop new ideas and distribute information; it means that Minnie truly was visionary! That means that Minnie's original vision was for NSP to become what we now know as a "knowledge-based" organization or a "learning organization."

So why are a very small handful of individuals promoting the concept of anarchy, or "returning NSP to the members?"

It is shocking to read the intentions of the petitioners. In the recently posted hearing transcript, Holmes, attorney for the Patroller Committee states in his testimony (referring to the actions taken by the Patroller Committee and petitioners) that "*We don't care* if ...actions proposed by members will make the National Ski Patrol *uninsurable, inoperable and defunct* [emphasis added]."

Clearly, anything goes.

A sad irony is that the newly elected board members (or any board members) actually stand very little chance of fulfilling the dreams and desires of the patroller committee. Here are three reasons why the board is destined to fail from the patroller committee viewpoint:

1. For over 60 years members have sent board members to run the organization on their behalf. These board members have received information, debated the merits of the issue; and then made a decision. Under the model pre-2002 board model, division directors and board representatives generally support the board actions while meeting in Denver, but then abandoned support for the board's actions when confronted by the members back home. They were left to be the bearers of bad tidings, a role they despised and undermined. So it's not bad people making bad decisions and communicating badly; rather it has been good people, good decisions, and bad communications. Because those decisions have never been successfully communicated with the members, it has created a great disconnect with many members who disagreed with the decisions, but did not have the supporting facts. This communication problem existed in 1938, it existed in 1968, and became so rampant in 1998 that the board could no longer tolerate the pain of miscommunication with members and started to re-organize. There have been no new processes developed in the last year to create better and more efficient communication with members. Until new processes and channels are developed, the new board has no communication vehicle for communicating with members beyond the tools already in place - meeting minutes, ski patrol magazine, attending division meetings, and riding the chair with patrollers in their home ski area.

2. A good friend recently made this observation: What makes the patroller committee think that new board members will go to board meetings, receive a great deal of information about a given issue, and then make bad decisions? Why would intelligent people actually support bad initiatives that would end the NSP (for instance making NSP an operational rescue group that operates ski patrols instead of operated by ski area managers, as proposed by the petitioners in their testimony)? Over the years, board members have come with their mandates and perspectives, yet managed to sift through all the data and made decisions that enabled members to serve customers.

3. And finally, by definition, the board will be making decisions, not members. You can either have a board or you can have anarchy. The board's job is to receive information and make decisions on behalf of members, not to give control to members. So once again, a few board members will be representing the interests of all members, leaving 26,437 without a voice. Members still will not run the association. Until anarchy is achieved and all 26,500 members get every shred of information available, weighing in on every decision, the NSP will not be "returned to the members," as advocated by the patroller committee.

So what happens next?

All of this may be good news for the other 23,000 members of the NSP. A board that makes informed decisions, representing the collective interests of all members, with a strategic eye towards the greater good, instead of the provincial micromanagement that has paralyzed the organization in the past, is good news for the majority of members. A board that is committed to customer service, building new processes and more effective ways of doing business, focusing on member needs (not the desires of a very small minority) and developing new ways to collaborate with important industry partners can create real value for members. A board that will embrace the concept of NSP being a learning organization and imagining new

ways to manage knowledge will help to carry our association into a strategic and competitive position in the industry.

A board that severs ties with NSAA, PSIA and OEC does *not* create value for members. Forming a patrollers union, having everyone in office resign, encouraging members to quit buying from the catalog and eliminating Host and Affiliate members *do not add value* for members. Turning back the clock thirty years (before *Sunday vs. Stratton*) to run ski patrols is not an acceptable option to most ski areas or any insurance companies. Choosing to run a multi-million dollar, extremely complex and high-risk organization without applying sound and accepted business principles is ludicrous.

Where is the rallying cry by members to serve the customer? Why aren't members clamoring to build a better information delivery process so that members are better enabled and skilled in order to serve customers? Shouldn't the dialog in the Forum be about sharing best practices, developing new and innovative ideas, building new business processes that make our jobs easier, building a good succession plan, creating avenues for learning and growth, promoting leadership, and quality control of our educational programs? Isn't that *really* what Minnie would want us to be doing?

There has been no perfect board of directors, nor will there be. There has been any number of communication problems, poorly communicated decisions, and some poor decisions. For that matter, we may not have perfect members, or even perfect customers. And no one denies that members play a very important role in serving our customers; they are just not the reason that NSP exists.

But we do have an opportunity -- the future. We cannot change what is past, but we can change what we choose do in the future. That is our unique human endowment; we *have the freedom to choose our responses*. So I challenge you to change the future.

If you don't know what a "learning organization" is, read the "Fifth Discipline" by Peter Senge. If you are not familiar with the ANSI, ISO and ASQ standards for educational quality, you should find out. If you are not familiar with board governance models, study up on John Carver and knowledge-based boards so that you will understand the basics of how modern non-profit boards and associations are structured. If you are not sure what "knowledge management" is, and why it is critical to the future of NSP, do some research.

If you don't want to be a part of the future with NSP or help the association and its members serve customers, please just leave so the rest of us can get on with our work. For this organization to survive, every member should be asking:

- What can I do that adds value to the organization?
- How can we better align with ski area managers and better serve our customers?
- What tasks, positions and processes can be eliminated, improved or redesigned to make our jobs easier?
- How can we enhance the quality of our educational programs?
- What can we do that will make our organization more attractive to new members?

And our leaders should be asking:

- How do I, personally as a leader, add value to the organization?
- What new programs, partnerships, alliances, products, services or resources would contribute to the health of the organization, serve customers better, add value or make life easier for members?
- How can I better fulfill my role as knowledge broker? How do I enable the flow of important information people need in order to be effective?
- What processes should we implement to make sure that right information is available to the people who need it at the right time?
- How can we better communicate with members and stakeholders?
- How are we preparing our next wave of leaders for the next level?
- What actions do I model that will give clues to the next group of leaders who may follow me? Am I actively engaged as a mentor, a coach and defining a strategy for the future?
- Who are our high potential leaders that we can put into an acceleration pool and what knowledge and developmental assignments will they need to perform?

When we start to see this kind of dialog on the Forum, patroller committee website, and division meeting minutes we are headed down the right path, until then . . .

Best regards,
Chris Ross