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Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

A good leader is an adaptable one

By Barry VanderKelen

One trait a nonprofit leader needs is adaptability.

Being able to adjust to current and emerging needs in the organization is vital; it allows the organization to remain relevant and for the leader to remain a leader.

Donors and the general public are drawn to stable organizations with stable leadership.

Dave Garth, the president and CEO of the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce, is someone who has evolved along with the organization.

He recently announced he will retire this summer. When he does leave the chamber, we will lose a role model for adaptability.

Dave served the chamber for 38 years. During his tenure, the needs of the business community changed dramatically. Obviously, he adapted. The stability he provided to the chamber allowed it to become one of the most admired chambers of commerce in the nation.

Countless strategic plans were written to keep the organization focused. Well-written strategic plans are road maps for what leadership skills are needed as the organization navigates its life cycle phases. Clearly, Dave grew as much as the chamber did.

Many of the processes used in business today didn't exist when Dave started working at the chamber. For example, personal computers were known only through science fiction books, and the Internet

was in its infancy and used only by university researchers. Yet, as technology changed, Dave had the chamber become an early adopter of technology to keep pace.

Most impressive is that the chamber has had a new board of directors every year Dave has worked there.

This means he has had 38 different groups of people to report to, and be evaluated by. Adapting to the individual and group personalities for as long as he did makes Dave a rare leader.

His example of adaptability is one all nonprofit leaders must study.

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Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of *The Tribune*

Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes a bi-weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community.

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Each column is reprinted as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@slocf.org.