

Dear Tom Smithson, NorCal member and CBL revision committee member,

Thanks for visiting the Sierra Nevada Unit Rally at Boca Rest and explaining your work towards solving some of the problems faced by the WBCCI. It seems that we agree that the fundamental problem is WBCCI's expression of a coherent identity: the WBCCI doesn't seem to know why it exists, what makes it special and unique, or its reason for being.

You hit a very good point in your description of the need for professional event management in regards to the annual WBCCI rally. A well qualified professional can be of great assistance in areas other than just events and much of what WBCCI faces, including its CBL efforts, are well within the scope of professional association management expertise and experience. From what I see, WBCCI does not currently respect such professions nor does it seem to understand or accept their value. That is a concern to me as I have witnessed this sort of value system in my forty years of involvement with association management and have have my own experiences in helping associations recover from obtaining inappropriate professional expertise.

There are a few basic rules of thumb and guidelines that need to be carefully considered by the WBCCI in its efforts to make changes for the future. One is that the action proposed to solve a problem should always be the minimum necessary to create a solution in order to minimize risk of significant collateral damage. Changes to the governance documents of the association are, by definition, major actions. Re-arranging the structure plus making changes in fundamental processes is compounding the impact and scope of the action.

Another guideline to consider is that solving real world problems has to consider practicality as a referent, not ideology. An example here is "one man, one vote" mantra being addressed. That is an ideological reference, not a practical one. The fact is that practical solutions to this problem of providing a means for each WBCCI member to express a vote in association affairs has already been provided by the WDCU, for instance. Another example of ideology is the talk about the existing code of ethics. That practical solutions are not accepted and ideological referents continue to be put on the table provide a warning that practical solutions are being held to non-practical constraints and this is a recipe for undesirable outcomes and unhappy members.

A third guideline is to be sure to understand the existing solutions before trying to change them. The existing WBCCI bylaws and constitution clauses, procedures, and methods are there for good reason and are common in many larger associations. Without a good understanding of the history of those practices and the reasons behind them, 'improvement' efforts have a significant chance of re-creating the original problem. Learning by experience over and over again is expensive and devastating to an organization. History has many lessons that need to be understood and heeded if one wants to solve problems effectively.

One problem that WBCCI faces is common to many associations. That is the matter of encouraging participation that runs the gamut from maintaining membership to involving members in association events, to filling positions of association leadership. Trying to get members to even speak up about their opinions and to engage in such basic affairs as voting is often rather difficult. Much of the current CBL is structured to address this problem of participation as well as to develop experience in operations within its management and governance structures.

*Robert's Rules* has much more to it than arcana of meeting management. From what I have heard from various WBCCI leaders to date, it seems poorly understood. You cannot just leave out chapters and sections, like those on delegates and conventions, and pretend you are on good ground with new ideas. The book represents centuries of experience in solving organizational decision making and it should be tapped for that experience.

I also noted the use of 50/50 splits in opinion as an argument for change. Such splits are rare and not of the sort of thing that can be handled well in any voting system. They indicate a serious divergence in values. Such civil wars in associations are not needed as participation is voluntary. The key for an association is to clarify its identity so that those who are not in agreement with it can go do their own thing under a different banner. A corollary to this is that the organization has to allow and accept that others may have related, but significantly different, values and preferences and should not be a part of the association. As I see it, much of the current brouhaha is an attempt to 'steal' the historical image of WBCCI and its Airstream relationships without accepting the responsibilities of the resulting ownership.

There are some much simpler things that could be done without needing all the mess of a constitutional convention. Simply separating the policies from the bylaws in the Blue Book would be one of these. That would reduce a lot of confusion.

Then changes could start from the bottom, the policies. Providing education to both members and IBT about the fact that it is indeed just policy. Then clear out those things, like the suggested unit CBL or the flag code or the badge descriptions, out of 'policy' and into a recommended practices and procedures manual. That could be done by the IBT alone.

There are very many things that can be done at the grass roots level. It has to be done there if any change is to occur. Top down efforts tend to fail unless they have grass roots buy in and that is where your visit to the SNU was very important. It was not only a chance for us to hear you, but also a chance for you to hear us. I hope our message was clear – and I also hope that it was not an uncommon one as I think there are many good reasons to be concerned about the proposed actions.

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Bryan Leipper, WBCCI #772