

DECISION LINE

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Renewing DSI: Communication and the Strategic Planning Process



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The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate. [Joseph Priestley, Chemist, 1733-1804, credited for discovering oxygen]

WHEN I BECAME PRESIDENT, Carol Latta, our executive director, asked me to prepare a list of objectives. My original list had one item on it: Renewal. I felt that it was my duty as president to ask the board to reflect on its relationship with the home office, to celebrate what we have, and then work diligently to bring back the special nature of DSI we have all loved for a long time.

In the last issue of *Decision Line*, I talked about adopting core values as we begin the process of renewal. These core values are communication, feedback, simplicity, and courage. In this column I will address communication.

As this issue of *Decision Line* is being published, you, as part of the DSI membership, are being asked to complete a survey concerning your opinions of the Institute, its purpose, philosophy, and priorities. You will help us reflect on our strengths and develop a vision in order for us to maintain the organization we have known and loved, but which also enables us to attract new members who will help us in the future.

I am asking your help in proving Joseph Priestly wrong—not about oxygen, but about communication. You can reach the Institute by contacting either me or the home office by phone, fax, mail, text messaging, e-mail, or in person at the annual meeting this November in Phoenix. In order to participate in the strategic planning process for the Institute, I encourage you to communicate with us.

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Communication Opportunities

During the next year, we will provide numerous opportunities for communication. In addition to our regular meetings of constitutionally mandated committees, standing committees, and *ad hoc* committees, we will conduct a survey of the membership and hold an innovative special session at the annual meeting in Phoenix, designed for you to tell us what is on your mind. Also, we have sessions for you to meet the editors of our journals and hear what they say about their approaches to publishing, including their intent to make the DSI journals even more prominent in our fields.

For the first time ever, we will be able to communicate in still another, albeit more informal, way. At the annual meeting, we will host a family barbeque on Sunday night. Janelle Heineke, the 2007 Annual Meeting program chair, tells me that you will not want to miss this very special event. The Sunday barbeque will be open to all members and their families at no additional charge. She promises good food and some family-friendly prize give-aways (best costume contest, farthest distance-traveled attendee, and more). Look for more information on the conference Web site.

A First Step in the Renewal Process: Surveying the Board

In order to begin this cycle of renewal, I arranged for a facilitator at the April board meeting. We began our strategic planning process by surveying the board members. All of the board members had the opportunity to read my statement on the importance of values in the Institute. The values I asked to be included in charges to every committee are: communication, feedback, simplicity, and courage.

The Board's survey responses were analyzed by Dr. Shelia Margolis, our group facilitator. Dr. Margolis is not a member of the Institute and therefore has no bias regarding it. She used qualitative methods to extract meaningful content from the survey responses.

To better understand the Institute, the board was asked questions relating to the nature of the organization and its vision, strengths, and challenges. Several key areas for discussion surfaced, but you might be pleased to learn that there was considerable agreement on how very special DSI is compared to other similar organizations.

After hearing the results of the survey, the board commissioned a survey to determine whether the general membership felt the same way about the Institute. The content from the board survey and discussion was used to develop the current survey that is being distributed to the entire membership. This is your chance to have an impact on the future of the Institute.

A Membership Survey on Strategic Issues

We are depending on all of you, our members of the DSI family, to send us your comments when you receive the member survey via e-mail. We, the Board, are eager to learn your opinions of and goals for the Institute as we move forward. Our policies and procedures sanction surveying the membership on a regular basis.

The survey is an electronic one that aggregates data but does not reveal details about individual respondents, who will remain anonymous. Completing the member survey will only take a few minutes of your time, but the benefits to DSI can be long lasting. Be assured that your thoughtful responses can help shape the strategic course for the Institute far into the future.

A Unique Board Retreat for Strategic Planning

At our April meeting, the board wanted to devote even more time to the planning process, so I have arranged a special board retreat to be held in August. Board members will meet in an intensive two-day meeting in Toronto to continue their discussion about renewing the Institute. Dr. Shelia Margolis will once again be our facilitator.

This face-to-face communication is desirable because we will be able to better understand the logic behind proposals for the Institute's renewal. During this meeting, membership survey results will be used to help develop a new strategic plan for the Institute and to create specific charges for DSI committees.

A Home Office Review

Every five years we communicate in still another way by conducting a home office review. I have appointed a blue-ribbon committee that will visit the home office, listen to the home office's concerns, and evaluate the daily operations of the Institute. The committee consists of three past presidents of the Institute: Bob Markland (Chair), Barbara Flynn, Tom Jones, and Executive Committee member Keong Leong. The information the committee elicits will be of great help to the Board.

A Town Hall Meeting

As a member of DSI, you will have a unique opportunity to communicate face-to-face with some board members and other Institute members during our first-ever Town Hall Meeting to be held during our annual meeting in Phoenix this November. We, the Board, are looking forward to sharing our progress on strategic planning as well as listening to member views on a new strategic vision for the Institute with the group assembled for the Town Hall meeting.

So, look for the Town Hall Meeting scheduled in Phoenix. I will chair a panel of board members who I feel are good listeners. Take this opportunity to express your concerns and suggestions to the board. At the 2008 January board meeting, we will use your suggestions to begin to set new policies and procedures.

We have this marvelous opportunity for renewal. Together we can reflect upon our past and make changes for the future. As we draw closer to commemorating the fourth decade of our organization, we have a chance to make it something very special indeed. ■