



Ken Newton,
CEO, VASA

Under the Southern Cross

Who's next?

Succession plans are all very well, but all the best conceived plans in the world still won't find you someone to replace you after you've gone – not really gone, I mean retired, had enough, taken your marbles and gone home.

The secret to succession plans is that you have to find somebody to replace you, and that's the really hard part.

Either lack of a succession plan, or inability to find someone to walk in your shoes is the reason why, in this country anyway, most small businesses don't change hands. As happened with a couple of our top VASA members recently—they advertised nationally, they looked under the local rocks, and couldn't get anyone remotely interested in taking over well run and profitable workshops. They just auctioned off all their equipment, closed the doors and went home.

Sad really, that private companies that build up a great name over half a century or so just disappear off the map.

What's the thread of this article, you're asking about now. I was leading up to saying that you'll find the same scenario in many voluntary organisations. The new reason for not being involved, for not joining something and not going to meetings or even social outings is, "I'm time poor."

What does that mean? Isn't life about setting priorities? You don't just run out of time to do things, do you?

So here we are at a recent VASA board meeting, with a debate raging on the subject of how to encourage any member of the association to take a real interest in the administration of the company. Like nominate for a position on the board of directors, or put a hand up to help out at the next convention, or anything.

I reminded the board that only once in VASA's 17 year history had anybody outside the incumbent directors ever sent in a formal nomination for a board position. I added that not once in VASA's history had the annual general meeting of members experienced the thrill of having to cast



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a vote to choose one out of two or more nominations for the board.

If you really want the truth, the VASA board has been 'stacked' from Day One, and we want volunteers – you, you and you!

Current VASA president Ian Stangroome is a very thoughtful guy, and he knows only too well that a stale organisation is not a productive organisation. The board members agreed. New blood, they said, is needed.

I jumped in again to remind the directors that I had placed a passionate plea in our last VASA newsletter for young guns in the association to consider being groomed for directorship and the result was, as expected, zilch.

While everyone in the room was either looking at the ceiling in the hope that somebody's name would be written by an unseen hand, or was pouring another cup of hotel swill, president Ian said, "I really don't think any member understands what it is we do. If only they could listen to our debates and watch how complex issues are decided, it might encourage them to join in the game."

Great idea, they all said. VASA has now adopted two very bold succession plans.

The first is that each director will nominate a likely candidate from the membership in his or her zone. (Yes, we have our first female director. Catherine Tocker represents our New Zealand members – say hi Catherine.)

For every board meeting, one of the names will be drawn out of the hat, and that member will be invited, all expenses paid, to the next meeting wherever it is held. They'll be flown in, accommodated, wined and dined and invited to join in any of the debates if they wish. The hope is that the chosen member will then go back to their local communities, if not with a desire to seek higher office then at least with a better perspective on VASA's role in the industry.

The next plan is already taking off like a rocket, and why not?—it's free! We have invented a new Student Associate membership, where auto students are offered free membership while they are still studying. When they get their certificates or their degrees, they will be invited to join up as a full paying member.

The hope is that through receiving newsletters, invitations at low rates to training sessions and access to our technical pages on the website, they will learn to understand the value of being in an industry network with a bit of clout and a good brand name.

Now if I can only find someone to replace me! ❀

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