

Prescriptions for Rejuvenating Your Certification Program

Presentation for the
American Society of Association Executives

Does Your Certification Program Need a Facelift? The Tell-Tale Signs

1. Do program expenses exceed revenues?
 - Line items contributing to loss
 - Possible reasons for less-than-expected revenue
 - Financial expectations of the board for the program: Subsidize? Self-sustaining?
 - Pricing

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

2. Is the annual number of candidates less than projected?

- Changes in the environment
- Competition
- Value added
- Marketing

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

3. Is the annual number of recertification candidates less than projected?

- Loss of value and credibility
- Stakes have been lowered
- Requirements unrealistic
- Restricted access

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

4. Does your program fall short of technical standards?

- Gap between program and standards
- Minor or major repair
- Low vs. high stakes

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

5. Has the nature of the profession changed so as to warrant a change in the certification program?
 - Higher stakes
 - More-complex job responsibilities
 - Movement toward multi-skilled workers

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

6. Do you expect that environmental forces will influence the nature of the certification in the future?
 - Deemed status
 - Regulation
 - Industry involvement

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

7. Are there indications that certificants are dissatisfied with the program and its related products and services?

- Customer complaints about service
- Appeals
- Lower recertification numbers
- Weak interest in marketing efforts or participating in the program

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

8. Do certificants and other stakeholders question the value of your certification program?

- Exclusivity vs. inclusivity
- Benefit structure
- Communication and public relations

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

9. Are there overlapping or competing certifications?

- Poor positioning
- Early or late entry
- Value vs. price
- Industry acceptance

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

10. Are volunteers less eager to contribute their time and effort to the program?

- Completion of assignments
- Attendance at meetings
- Recruitment difficulties
- Incentives and disincentives

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

11. Do staff feel that technology is not being used effectively in program development, operations and delivery?
 - Technology audit
 - Benchmarking
 - Strategic alliances/partnerships
 - Outsourcing vs. building in-house capabilities

The Tell-Tale Signs (cont'd)

12. Does your organization have an overall strategic plan or a specific business marketing plan for the program?

- Board and volunteer involvement
- Needs analysis
- Risks vs. opportunities
- Realistic timelines
- Resources needed

What's Your Score?

0-3 = Your program has just a few “wrinkles.”

4-7 = Your program needs some “nips and tucks” here and there.

8-12 = Your program needs major cosmetic surgery!

If Your Program Has Just a Few “Wrinkles” ...

- Check with your customers and stakeholders frequently to see if the program is satisfying their needs.
- Develop ideas for new products and services to meet market demand.

If Your Program Has Just a Few “Wrinkles”... (cont’d)

- Look for opportunities to strengthen your program through partnerships and strategic alliances.
- DON’T postpone developing and initiating a continuous improvement plan just because program currently is doing well.

If Your Program Needs Some “Nips and Tucks” Here and There...

- Appoint a credible, high-level volunteer task force on program evaluation to work with staff and serve as a link to the Board.
- Get close to the “customer” and find out what program changes will lead to higher customer satisfaction.

If Your Program Needs Some “Nips and Tucks” Here and There... (cont’d)

- Institute a “brief and watch” policy to keep abreast of critical changes in the environment that might have an impact on your program.
- Be strategic in planning for change and budget appropriately to obtain the resources necessary to carry out your strategy.

If Your Program Needs Major Cosmetic Surgery... (cont'd)

- DON'T be lured into using new technology and expanding the program with new certifications or new products and services to increase participation in the program.
- DON'T use marketing dollars to try to increase the number of candidates before determining why volumes are below expectations.
- DO benchmark.

If Your Program Needs Major Cosmetic Surgery... (cont'd)

- Institute a serious planning process that sets priorities and includes:
 - A communications plan to keep all stakeholders (including the Board) informed.
 - A marketing plan to motivate customers to buy into the envisioned program changes.
 - A business plan containing the timeline for the rejuvenation and how much it will cost.