

Facilitator Forum - Wednesday, September 24, 1997 - David Hefner

The Planning Committee once again brought a Facilitator to convention with the purpose of prioritizing issues and coalescing thoughts in the minds of the delegation at the very beginning of convention. Tom Lyndon's survey on behalf of the Committee which was completed this summer also was undertaken with this purpose in mind.

Dave presented a discussion based on "member-based service: a new wave of thinking for the association." He is trying to get USMS to view our organization and its workings from a business perspective. We have a product to sell in a competitive market, and we must determine the best way to do this. He feels that we have come a long way since Orlando with the establishment and expansion of our website and the subsequent exposure it has provided for USMS. His handout is very comprehensive and walks us through this process. Copies of this handout were made available to all attendees. Dave feels strongly that no organization can succeed by trying to be all things to all members; to solidify membership, USMS must be superior in one dimension and at least parity in the other two. In his model, members' perceptions of value center on three dimensions: "product leadership," "operational excellence," and "member intimacy." His "pick" was the track of "member intimacy," complete with customized services, personalized communications, etc - "one-stop shopping," if you will - whereby USMS would deal with its membership as if they are members for life.

There followed a lively discussion with the audience. It was felt that our leadership must agree as to what we stand for - fitness or competition? Is there really a difference? Aren't we all essentially fitness swimmers, with competition being a goal for some of us? We all agreed that we would swim even if there were no competitive outlet, although competition does provide motivation to work out and train regularly. There was also a strong feeling that coaches are the glue which hold the swimming world together, but not all of the coaches who are available are as well-educated as they should be with regard to Masters, nor are they all USMS-registered. Our coach mentor program should be a catalyst in this education process and hopefully will increase the number of coaches available to Masters. We need to be more aggressive with our marketing to increase our overall visibility in the community. It is hoped that, should USMS decide to hire a so-called Executive Director, this would be one of the responsibilities of the position. Growth is a by-product of good promotion of USMS; the fact that we feel good about ourselves when we climb out of the water is what we have to sell. Growth is not an end in itself, but it will be inevitable if our message is a good one.