

Reinventing Your Organization for the 21st Century

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What must our job be if we are to be successful in confronting global warming, in safeguarding wildlife for our children's future, in ensuring that children learn the love and respect of the great outdoors as we did? What must our job be when we look around this room and think about the future of wildlife conservation in America?

I will suggest to you today that our jobs must be to reinvent our organizations for the 21st century. Gone are the days when we could rely on our hunting and fishing comrades to sustain our organizations. Gone are the days when we could ignore the political realities and opportunities to influence the policies that will dictate the health of natural systems across this great land of ours. Gone are the days when a few meetings made an organization.

National Wildlife Federation boasts of being the largest conservation organization in the country, with "more than four million members and supporters." But I must ask myself, --- and all of us should ask ourselves – why is it not 10 or 20 or 40 million members and supporters? Impossible? I don't think so. That is, if we all decide what kind of job we really need to do.

Imagine with me for a moment an organization with a successful chapter model where members were engaged and empowered to reach out to a variety of different networks and communities in their state. Where members stepped up and enrolled their neighbors in the importance of turning inside kids, out.

An invigorated organization with new, diverse community leaders, increased political clout because of diligent outreach and credible relationship-building with key decision makers.

Imagine an organization building the next generation of conservation leaders. Young people who stepped up to protect their own future and the lands and wildlife they love. Young people who were actively engaged in our Annual Meetings, even advancing their own resolutions. Imagine more young people than 60-somethings at our annual meetings. (Now, that's not to say the 60-somethings aren't important! We need to be infusing our ranks with younger people.)

Or, imagine deciding to stop doing the same old things the same old ways. Deciding instead to build a bigger tent, full of more diverse people who shared the same values but showed up differently, maybe even talked differently. Imagine saying where we've been isn't where we need to go. Imagine getting out of the comfort zone to play big. Imagine deciding that your job was to rebuild your organization for the 21st century.

Imagine taking on the biggest and baddest development project in your state. A project well-funded, politically connected and off the radar for most of the rest of the country. Imagine saying "we won't take it anymore" – and actually doing something about it and mobilizing voters in your state and to achieve one of the biggest voter turnouts in your state's history.

Well for some in this room, we don't have to imagine it. Because for some affiliates, that's actually what they're doing. So let me please recognize four affiliates in particular who have decided that business as usual is not a recipe for success.

For their work to invigorate their organization with a successful and growing chapter model, for bringing in new diverse community leaders into their network, for stepping up to advance the goals of National Wildlife Federation's connecting people with nature strategic driver, will representatives from the North Carolina Federation please stand up and be recognized.

Thank you.

An organization's future relies on the infusion of new blood – new ideas, new perspectives. Knowing that "guarding our natural heritage" requires a commitment to the next generation, the Conservation Federation of Missouri has demonstrated an organizational imperative to engage the next generation in decisions about conservation policies in their state. For your visionary work to build the Conservation Leadership Corp that engages high school and college students, will representatives from the Conservation Federation of Missouri please stand up to be recognized.

Thank you.

We hear a lot of talk about "movement-building." Well.. we all better realize that we have to do more than just talk about it. Without a commitment to true movement building, our "movement" will become weaker and weaker. Movement building requires that we look around the table and ask ourselves, "Are we relevant to a broader group of citizens?" "Who will feel welcome at our board table?" "Who will we learn from and broaden our perspectives for the benefit of the greater good?" "How open are we to change?"

The Texas Conservation Alliance went through a strategic planning process with the commitment to move from being an East Texas group to becoming a Big Tent. And in Texas, that's no small task. But they were committed to step up and be a coalition-builder – to develop and nurture a network of diversity. They reached out to state agencies to address the biggest threat to wildlife today, global warming. They stepped up to help pass No Child Left Inside legislation – because they know this is key to the future and to building the next generation of conservation leaders. They are network weavers – knitting together diverse groups of citizens into a larger network that continues to grow in clout and influence. Will representatives from the Texas Conservation Alliance please stand and be recognized.

Thank you.

In 2005, a group of sportsmen decided they had had enough. They knew that if the world's largest run of wild salmon was going to be protected, they would have to take matters into their own hands. And so the Renewable Resources Coalition was founded to oppose the development of the world's biggest copper and gold mine in the pristine Bristol Bay watershed in Alaska. At first this impending travesty was little known. Now, RRC has increased awareness about the mine for nearly 100% of Alaskans through grassroots outreach and advocacy. Let's take a look at their work: [RUN VIDEO]

Thanks to RCC, Pebble Mine is becoming a national issue, similar to what happened with the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge. Will representatives from the Renewable Resources Coalition please stand up and be recognized.

What these four affiliates have in common is the awareness that reinventing the way we do business is a requirement in the turbulent times we live in.

They know that unless they are creating opportunities for citizens to engage with them, to feel a part of something bigger than themselves, unless they are reaching out routinely to build relationships and broaden their network, their organization will just be treading water.

As leaders in your affiliate, I challenge you today to think about what you need to do to reinvent your organization for the 21st century. What must your organization do to be more relevant, more essential, more an integral part of the decisions that impact conservation in your state, in your region, in America? What is your strategy to build a healthy and robust organization – to be the go-to organization in your state? To create opportunities to engage a diverse group of citizens in your work? What is your strategy to ensure that your organization is the voice of conservation in your state?

Leadership my friends is not defined by a title or a salary or inheritance. Leadership is earned. It is hard work. And our job is hard work, if we are doing what needs to be done. So what are the elements of the job we must do because no one else will do it for us? Here's a few of the essentials:

1. **Donor and activist cultivation:** this must be upper most in your mind – you must be constantly thinking about this. What's your list of calls to make this week? Who will you visit? When is the membership cultivation letter going out? Who can you mobilize tomorrow to show up at a town hall meeting?
2. **The leadership pipeline:** how often have you thought about your replacement? Building the pipeline of new leaders is essential. If you aren't thinking about your replacement, you're not doing your job. You've got to create the space for others to step up.

3. **Coalition-building:** your organization is only as successful as your network is big. As Charles Dobson, who writes about social movements noted, "The relentless enthusiasm of a good organizer will inspire enthusiasm and optimism in others, even in the worst circumstances." Be relentless in your enthusiasm to organize like-minded allies that share your similarities and -- those who do not. As Dobson so astutely reminds us: "Similarity helps the communication and building of trust, while diversity presents new ideas and perspectives. *Connect through your similarity and innovate through your diversity.*"

4. **Focus on common ground:** Every affiliate to survive in the 21st century will need to reach out beyond the traditional hunting and angling communities to others who share common values. There is much you have in common with those who have never hunted or fished, but who have in their hearts the same love and desire that you do to protect our natural heritage. You need them in the fold. You may not agree on everything, but that abiding love of the outdoors and the solace it brings will be the tie that binds.

5. **Get your hands dirty:** create opportunities to engage citizens in restoration efforts, in activities that are fun and inspiring. Don't seat behind the desk and expect to be relevant. Be a connector out there in your community.

6. **Use your Regional Representative:** that's right. Really use them. They are your resource. They are your direct link to National Wildlife Federation and have your best interest in mind. Let's take a moment right now to acknowledge the contributions of our Regional Reps: please stand up and be recognized.

And last, but certainly not least,

7. **Be brutally honest:** about your organization's health, standing in the community, your membership, your board, your own leadership. Think systems: for fundraising, activism, membership and board development. Do you have systems in place to address all these fundamental functions of healthy organizations? If not, figure out what you have to do to build them and get started.

The National Wildlife Federation depends on, and is defined by, the success of our affiliates. You are the bedrock of this organization. We face an era of new and difficult challenges and need new ideas, new models and approaches to ensure we continue to be relevant in our communities, in our states and in America.

As leaders, you must be looking five to ten years down the field. What does your organization need to look like in a decade? What do you need to do right now, to get there? What do you need to do tomorrow? And the next day, and the next?

My wish for each and every affiliate in the National Wildlife Federation family is this: and I borrow the words from Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*: my wish is that each affiliate "makes such a unique contribution to the communities it touches and does its work with such unadulterated excellence that if it were to disappear, it would leave a hole that could not be easily filled by any other institution on the planet."

Thank you affiliates for what you have done in the past

Thank you affiliates for what you are doing in the present

Thank you affiliates for what you are going to do in the future.