



FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO DOING WHAT'S RIGHT VS. WHAT'S EASY

BY ROB DINGMAN

It is not an exaggeration to say that what I found at the AMA when I was named president and CEO in 2007 was an organization facing an existential crisis, or rather a series of them. As a member I was well aware of the significant public relations challenges the AMA was experiencing at the time, but I was not at all prepared for the depths of the financial and organizational problems that existed. Read more about this beginning on page 47.

In my job interview I described the AMA as having become “organizationally arrogant.” It was apparent to me from outside the organization that many of the AMA’s problems were

of the AMA and the reasons for its existence, I knew that someone had to fix what was wrong for the good of motorcycling. And that is why I returned to the AMA; I wanted to repair the damage that had been done, both operationally and reputationally.

Although I returned to the AMA at the end of 2006, I was not given the reins until the spring of 2007 after a transition period with an interim CEO. It had been my desire to work with the staff in place at the time to bring about the changes necessary to get the AMA back on track. But as it turns out, people aren’t generally willing to give up autonomy to which they feel entitled. While I tried hard to get people to see

didn’t like that I had been forced to fire some of his lieutenants who refused to take direction from their new boss.

The defamation aimed at both me personally and the AMA was significant and incessant. The easy thing to do would have been to stop making needed changes and revert to the status quo, but I chose to continue to do what was right rather than do what was easy.

What continued to drive me was the belief that the organization must be fixed, and if not by me then who? Had my detractors been successful in driving me out of the AMA, the organization would have experienced another long period of leadership vacuum and financial irresponsibility that would have proven detrimental to the organization.

AMA Board member at the time and AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer John Ulrich once described the situation as me riding on a fire truck on the way to a fire, and I just needed to ignore the dogs barking along the side of the road. It was good advice, and it helped me to stay the course and continue to make difficult decisions for the betterment of the AMA.

As the AMA celebrates its 100th year, the Association is much stronger and in much better shape financially than it was when I arrived. It is governed by a board of directors that is accountable to our membership. Our staff is much more responsive to our members as well, and the organizational culture is much improved, with the staff serving our members rather than dictating to them. I am glad that I chose to do what was right over what was easy.

HAD MY DETRACTORS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN DRIVING ME OUT OF THE AMA, THE ORGANIZATION WOULD HAVE EXPERIENCED ANOTHER LONG PERIOD OF LEADERSHIP VACUUM AND FINANCIAL IRRESPONSIBILITY THAT WOULD HAVE PROVEN DETRIMENTAL TO THE ORGANIZATION.

attributable to an attitude that permeated the Association that was seriously off-putting to both members and partners. Decisions seemed to be driven more by personality and animus than documented policy, and this often included self-serving interpretations of AMA rulebooks.

I would discover that a primary reason for this was a leadership vacuum that existed for roughly two years after the departure of the two decade-tenured president in 1999. The leadership void permitted the development of departmental fiefdoms that operated with near autonomy, and by the time the AMA Board finally got around to hiring Rob Rasor as AMA president, the task of bringing the AMA back together to be guided by one leader was nearly unachievable under the circumstances.

Since I truly believed in the mission

a different path forward, too many had a vested interest in the status quo to allow change, let alone be part of it. In the end, the only way to change the entrenched, detrimental culture was to change the entrenched *people*.

In 2007, AMA members were paying for the AMA to be grossly overstaffed. There were roughly 115 full-time staffers employed by the AMA, a significant portion of whom were part of the professional racing subsidiary. Today there are just over 50, and the AMA is providing more and better service to our members.

I was vilified on social media and in the motorcycle press for the organizational changes I made. Much of that came from industry stalwarts and race organizers who had lost their access to the levers of power at the AMA, and from disgruntled former employees, including a former AMA president who

Rob Dingman is the President and CEO of the AMA, and a Charter Life Member