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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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AASL President

If you've ever been to the Tattered Cover Bookstore in Denver, Colorado, you know that it is a very dangerous place—dangerous to your pocketbook. On a recent trip there with an auspicious AASL Committee, which was busy with a major task, we decided to spend the evening feeding our bodies and minds at the Tattered Cover. (They have both a coffee shop and restaurant amid the half-million titles.) Faced with the continuing project of restructuring AASL, I wandered through the business section looking for books about effective organizations. To my delight, I came across Peter F. Drucker's *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask about Your Nonprofit Organization Participant's Workbook* (Jossey-Bass, 1993). As I review the progress of restructuring AASL, readers might apply these questions to a state or local organization to help determine its organizational health.

What Is Our Business Mission?

An organization should know what it is trying to achieve or whether its mission needs to be revisited. AASL has done this thoughtfully and has produced a new mission statement which is to:

Advocate excellence, facilitate change, and develop leaders in the school library media field.

Who Is Our Customer?

Every organization should know its primary and supporting customers. It should also know how its customer base is changing. Currently, AASL has commissioned a massive survey of 2,500 members and 5,000 nonmembers trying to ascertain what attracts members to and what holds members in this organization and how the organization might appeal to a wider segment of the school library media field. The results of this survey will be ready for the Board in May 1996.

What Does the Customer Value?

The organization must know what primary and supporting customers value, how well the organization is providing valued services, and how it could be more effective in providing value. Not only will the survey mentioned before provide such data, but hundreds of officers at the 1996 ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Antonio had an opportunity to provide suggestions on how The New AASL could be more effective. I am proud to say that every idea has been collected, classified, and presented to the Board by a task force headed by Susan Ballard. Four other task forces chaired by Marjorie Pappas, Frances Bradburn, Phyllis Heroy, and Barbara Weathers have worked hard to discover essential and nonessential

functions performed in AASL. Many actions have already been taken to streamline the work of the organization, eliminate committee duplication, and propose new ideas.

What Have Been Our Results?

An organization must assess how well it has used its resources to achieve its greatest successes. It should not jeopardize its success as it evolves structurally. One of the best things that has happened as we have been considering The New AASL is that all of our information sources are concentrating on the essential functions of AASL. As the Board meets in retreat in Chicago (May 1996), we will be information-rich with data structured in such a way that a new organizational structure will appear as we deliberate on what we want to accomplish. This is perhaps one of the most exciting parts of the process to observe. If we were restructuring a school, we would want to start with what students need and what kinds of people they should be. We would not automatically assume there would be a principal, departments, grade levels, etc. Our AASL Committees working on the new national guidelines have taken the same approach. They have begun with essential questions about what a student who has encountered K-12 Library Media Centers should be able to do and how these young people should behave in a vibrant information society. Essential questions: Why? What? How? Who?

What Is Our Plan?

Every organization must plan to refocus its efforts on a periodic schedule as its clientele and the environment it finds itself in changes and evolves. The AASL Board has already spent a year doing this, and our goal is to have a new and fresh organizational structure that will carry out our essential functions into the next decade. As president, I have challenged the Board to act thoughtfully and with 100 percent consensus as we create and recommend to you, the members, The New AASL.

I cannot express enough gratitude to the fine members of the Board, the AASL staff, and the many leaders of this association who have stepped forward smartly with ideas, support, and encouragement as we have proceeded along the path. Jackie Mancall began this project, and it has continued through my presidency and will hopefully culminate early in the presidency of Barbara Stripling. It has been and will continue to be a magnificent and uplifting experience for me as your president. I knew that the people in this field were wonderful and great; I just didn't realize how wonderful and great they were. Thank you. Thank you on behalf of the children of this nation who are the recipients of all for which we hope and dream. ▼

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