

COMMITTING TO CHANGE

WHENEVER I REFLECT ON WHAT I'VE LEARNED IN OVER 20 YEARS OF WORKING FOR ASSOCIATIONS, I AM POWERFULLY AWARE OF BELONGING TO A PROFESSION THAT I FEEL HAS THE POTENTIAL TO CHANGE THE WORLD.

ASSOCIATIONS ARE UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO ADDRESS SOCIETAL CHALLENGES AND TO EFFECT POSITIVE CHANGE. WE SEE THIS EXEMPLIFIED TIME AND TIME AGAIN WHEN ASSOCIATIONS CONTRIBUTE TO RELIEF EFFORTS, RAISE AWARENESS AND FUNDS FOR DISEASE RESEARCH, OR SET STANDARDS THAT KEEP PRODUCTS SAFE FOR CONSUMERS. THE WORK THAT IS DONE BY ASSOCIATIONS LITERALLY TOUCHES EVERY CORNER OF THE WORLD. OUR MISSIONS MAY BE UNIQUE, BUT ALL ASSOCIATIONS ARE CAPABLE OF MOBILIZING VAST ARMIES OF KNOWLEDGEABLE, SKILLED INDIVIDUALS TOWARD A COMMON PURPOSE.

TEXT **SUSAN SARFATI** - CAE



Susan Sarfati, CAE is president and CEO of The Center for Association Leadership and executive vice president of ASAE.

Increasingly, we are seeing associations join their corporate members and business partners in modeling a commitment to *'social responsibility.'* This is defined a number of different ways, but at minimum, it's a voluntary acknowledgement that an organization or industry has a responsibility to society. Social responsibility fits neatly into the role of associations as public stewards working for public good.

MARGARET MEAD

'NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. INDEED, IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.'

ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership have over the past two years facilitated a tremendously productive dialogue on the topic of social responsibility, and we are in the midst of planning a first-ever **Global Summit** that will help further define how associations can harness their power and influence to move SR from conversation to action. **The Global Summit on Social Responsibility will take place 30 April - 2 May, 2008 at a host site in Washington, DC, and at dozens of connected sites in the US and around the world, as well as online.**

The host site will be at the new Gaylord National Hotel & Conference Center just outside Washington DC.

For the purposes of our planning, ASAE & The Center have defined social responsibility as: *'a commitment to leveraging the power of associations to create practices that make a positive social, economic, and environmental impact while creating healthier organizations.'*

The Global Summit will not be a typical conference with speakers. The program will be facilitated by Director of the Center for Business as An Agent of World Benefit at Case Western Reserve University, **Dr. David Cooperrider.**

We realise that not every association is going to want to address the same issue, but every association does have the ability to do something that positively impacts the industries or professions it represents and its community, and we think there are some shared principles that associations can adopt to think responsibly. We're just a few months away from really identifying the unique competencies associations bring to the table, and how those competencies can be leveraged to effect change. Beyond sharing stories and talking about what our community can do, we're going to leave this Summit with guiding principles that associations can employ if they choose to integrate social responsibility into their everyday operations.

We're also going to use the Summit to make the business case for social responsibility. Studies show the benefits to associations practicing SR include potential cost savings, more engaged members and motivated staff, increased visibility, easier employee recruitment, better risk management and higher member retention and recruitment rates. That is one of the points we are emphasising: that being socially responsible isn't charity; it can positively affect your bottom line.

The entire staff and volunteer leadership at ASAE & The Center have made our social responsibility initiative a top priority not just for 2008, but future years as well. We're not proclaiming to have all the answers, but we know that together, we can get to where we want to be as a professional community.

That's why it's so important that we have passionate, thoughtful and innovative thinkers at the upcoming Global Summit. If you care about social responsibility or want to learn more about tapping into your organisation's potential for effecting positive change, I encourage you to make plans to attend either our host location in Washington DC, or one of the connected sites. If your schedule doesn't permit you to attend in person, you are welcome to contribute to the dialogue online.

Read more about our Global Summit (30 April - 2 May) at www.asaecenter.org/globalsummitsr