

IDEAS

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LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLIOM

HOBNOBBING 101

My history with NAMM started back in 1989. Despite what turned into a pretty good run, I nearly missed the opportunity of a professional lifetime. Fortunately, everything worked out for me, but I came awfully close to missing an extraordinary experience. Here's the story:

In April of 1989, I was approached about joining the NAMM board of directors by then Chairman of the Nominating Committee, Jack Coffey. As I came to learn, the senior class of NAMM board members and executive committee had met, as they do once a year, to choose a slate of individuals to stand for election to the board. They actively seek input from NAMM membership to identify candidates who will make up a board that fairly represents all factions of the music industry.

When the call came in from Jack, I was somewhat dumbfounded. Actually, in hindsight ... I was just dumb! I just didn't see myself as that kind of person. I was a young businessman who was forging new ground in the red-hot combo sector, predicting



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the next hot trend, and focused entirely on growing my business. What did I know about board governance? What did I care? More than anything, I had a set of preconceived notions about NAMM and its board — and they weren't pretty. I believed that the board was a bunch of cantankerous guys who gathered

in smoky boardrooms and took a break from their drunken carousing only long enough to get in 18 holes.

Where did such crazy beliefs come from? Perhaps it was a less friendly press back in those days. Or maybe it was a NAMM that didn't do as good a job as they do today in educating their constituents, in self-promotion, and in image building.

THE LESSON LEARNED

Regardless of the reasons for my misguided disrespect, I decided that I'd use this opportunity to go shake up the organization. The lesson learned: NAMM needed little fixing. Rather it was me who would have his arrogance and narrow-mindedness knocked down. What I discovered was a trade association that was incredibly well-run, with a capable and devoted staff, and industry volunteers who, like myself, became obsessed with doing their very best for the music products industry. The NAMM boardroom was a place where talented people worked together for the greater good of the MI industry. Serving on the NAMM board offered me the opportunity to work side by

side with true icons of our industry. And in doing so, every moment spent there was a huge learning experience.

Whatever I contributed to NAMM, I was rewarded a hundredfold with the personal knowledge gained by listening to other smart people and learning from their experiences. Through my time at NAMM (and my on-going association with the organization), I met and became friends with hundreds of gifted leaders from every corner of the globe and every segment of our diverse industry. I also learned the astoundingly important role of networking and moving beyond my own narrowly focused business. The universal knowledge and industry contacts gained through my work at NAMM has made me a better-rounded, more competent businessman. The temptation is always to exclusively work hard on your own business. But ironically, some of your greatest benefits will come from looking beyond your own four walls. **MI**

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