

# Four Pillars of Commitment:

## Introduction

I often read and hear about the importance of having a balanced Board where we find complementary skills that will assure a healthy governance for the organization. Although I agree with this, I believe there is another level that must be taken into account in the creation of a strong and committed Board.

I was lucky enough to have Father Paul Abbass as a colleague on the BBBS of Canada Board. He believed that members of any board should have a personal and emotional commitment to the mission of their organization. To help understand what that different level of commitment is, he proposed the “Four Pillars of Commitment”: Keepers of the Flame, Apprentice, Stewardship and Yearning.

I realized that his way of speaking of commitment stayed with me. I often think of these pillars because they help me to reflect on my level of commitment and how do I express and more importantly how to I nourish it.

Today I would like to share my understanding of these Four Pillars inspired by Paul’s proposal and why I believe that they are important to reflect on as a member/volunteer of conference and as a conference within a larger organization.

## Keepers of the Flame

Many centuries ago, before human understood how to make a fire, they had to rely on nature to produce it. If they were lucky enough to find a Flame they took all the means they had to keep it alive. They had to learn how to nourish it, how to use it properly and safely. They probably had to fight for it and share it.

Fire was very important. It kept them warm, gave them light. They could cook their food, scare away wild animals, etc. Therefore, it was crucial to find it and more so to maintain it. Thus the need for “Keepers of the Flame”.

Having the Flame brought other benefits. It brought the clan together; important decisions could be made around a fire. It attracted people from other clans, travellers would approach the Flame with the hope they would be accepted, find food and warmth; news from all parts of the territory would be exchanged, alliances could be formed, celebrations happened. With time being around the flame created a sense of belonging between the people through shared events, concerns and stories.

The responsibility of the “Keepers of the Flame” in that context was critical: keep the Flame alive and strong.

Flame did not necessarily attract everyone. Some travellers saw the flame but did not stop; they were anxious to get back to their own clan and. Others were

probably afraid of the people of that clan or of the fire, itself, and; some probably did not even see the flame being too far from it.

When you think about it this is a wonderful and pertinent analogy for an organization.

Members/volunteers are today's "Keepers of the Flame". The mission, the cause of the organization they serve, is the Flame, and the reason they choose to become a member/volunteer. They were attracted to the mission because it speaks to them and it has an emotional resonance for them, a calling, and they were welcomed by the members / volunteers of this organization.

Members/volunteers have the responsibility to keep the mission alive and strong, in order to keep it vibrant and meaningful. Otherwise, the organization will lose its power of attraction and its capacity of achieving its mission and goals. They do it by welcoming new comers, by sharing news and stories. They create with time a sense of belonging in their community where people want to be part of it.

There is a danger of letting the fire die when the group becomes a social club where new people are not allowed to come and disturb us. When the organization is too task-oriented and forget to remind themselves why the mission is important to guide our actions. Without the flame the organization loses its vitality, its power of attraction.

Questions:

What attracted you to this flame/organization?

How are you a Keeper of the flame? How do you nourish your flame?

What do you do as a conference to keep the flame/mission alive and strong?

## The second pillar: Disciple

At first, when Father Paul spoke about of the pillar of disciple, I was reluctant toward that concept since my perception of disciple was one a follower that has lost his will or her own personality. I was also wondering how being a disciple related to being commitment? The more I thought about it the more I saw the value of this pillar. Being a Disciple is to be humble by the mission of the organization and be guide by it. It is to accept to act in a way that will make the organization stronger and more pertinent to its environment.

Being a member/volunteer on a board of director or a conference, a new or an experienced one, requires a disciple attitude i.e., open to listening and learning from the others, from the organization and for the environment in which the organization evolves. Being a disciple is to stay open to the changing environment and ready to learn and change so that the organization stays relevant to its members, clientele and community.

It has to be a "practical experience" i.e., where members meet, talk, listen, question, participate and observe what is going on in the organization and in the

community they serve. Being a Disciple is accepting to be challenged by the changes that have to be done so the mission can remain alive and strong.

At first, being a “Disciple” is hard because it means to admit that we do not know everything and that we need to learn about many things even if we have experience in other organizations. It requires that I respect my colleagues and the people we serve. We need to be humble, which for some is a learning on its own.

In the process of Discipleship, being courageous is needed: when we share knowledge with others, when we voice our concerns, our disagreements, when we need to take a stand when we see things that could hurt the organization and our capacity of fulfilling our mission. There are moments where our influence can be felt on others and on the organization since it is built on what we have observed, shared and learned. To be an effective Leader requires the ability of being an effective “Disciple”.

Having a Disciple attitude should not be limited to members alone but should be a requisite value to the conference since it is its responsibility to remain connected, open and relevant in our community and the people we serve. Without this attitude the conference will become at some point obsolete and the organization itself out of sync with its mission.

Questions:

- How am I a Disciple?
- As a conference, do we take time to share our observation, our learnings, our ideas?
- Do we accept to be challenge by the changes that we have to undergo to remain effective and pertinent as an organization?
- As a Disciple, am I also a leader when it is required?

### Third Pillard: Stewardship

This pillar is a strong reminder that we are passing through the SSVP.

One of Webster’s definitions of Stewardship is: “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care”.

There are two main principles around “Stewardship”:

The first principle: a “Steward” is acting in the name of the owners in respect of their vision, values and philosophy.

The second principle: a “Steward” is a temporary contributor, no matter how long or how meaningful the contribution.

Based on these two principles, when we accept to become a volunteer/member or be a director on a Board, we become a “Steward”. We are therefore temporally entrusted with the care and well-being of the organization and we are accepting

to act in the name of the mission and the people we serve.

The words “entrusted”, “care” and “well-being” are strong and meaningful words. They remind us that the role of a member of a conference calls for moral and ethical values that goes beyond the task of helping people and undertake legal and administrative responsibilities.

We have to remember that we have to transmit what has been lent to us. We are not the owners of the conference, however we are responsible for it.

As Steward, we should remain focus on what the organization needs to stay relevant and impactful in the community. Every member/volunteer should remember that today’s decisions and actions will impact the future of the organization and that other members, following us, will be working with what we have brought to it. Every member should leave the organization in a better situation than when they started. They have the responsibility of transmitting the tools and the means that new members will need to continue the work of the organization.

In that context being a Steward often requires the courage to make tough decisions and the humility of putting our ego and our own interests aside, if they go against the interest of the organization. This requires us to always question our motives and purposes.

Like any steward, we are accountable as to our members, clientele, donors and partners, not only financially and legally, but more so morally and ethically.

With time and reflection, this pillar has helped me realize that by being in an organization, I should honour the contributions of people before me and be aware that I must prepare as best as possible those who will follow me.

Questions:

- How do we make sure as a member that we remember that we are not owners of our conference?
- As steward, how are we preparing to pass on the conference to the new and future volunteers?
- Am I ready to step aside and let the new ones take their places and take over the stewardship of the conference?

## Fourth Pillar: Aspiration

This pillar speaks of what do a member, a conference, a Board can aspire for the organization as a whole. It goes further than logical goals, measurable objectives. It is about an emotional wanting that makes the involvement a personal commitment, it gives a sense to our commitment.

This pillar offers us to not only have aspirations for our conference and SSVP, but also to have aspirations for ourselves for our own commitment. As we commit to the growth of the organization, we must commit to our own growth within that

organization.

It is important for the growth of the organization to share our aspiration toward it. Taking the time to reflect and create common aspirations with the other members can inspire our actions, our discussions, our decisions as a group.

The profound wealth of developing a common vision within conference and SSVP members is the respect and compassion we develop for each other and the beneficiaries we serve. The organization creates opportunities to grow, to be challenged, to learn and to become a better person ourselves.

Having a common vision as an organization when it is based on compassion, mutual aid, support from others can transform us into agents of change for our communities.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the pillar of aspiration goes beyond tasks, statistics, administrative goals. This pillar is the emotional and even spiritual binder of commitment.

Questions:

- How are we developing a vision together?
- How do we respect and show compassion for our SSVP colleagues and beneficiaries?
- Are we agents of change in our environment?