

PATA TEAMWORK, GIVE AND TAKE, MAKE OR BREAK

BY BERT VAN WALBEEK

Many tourism stakeholders keep mentioning to me that the last word about PATA will soon be spoken, and this reminds me of an American game show called The Last Word. On that show, teams had to guess words and, if the team guessed correctly, they would win that word, but the first team to guess the last word in the group of three, wins the game. A victory was signified by a star lighting up on the team's podium, and a best two-out-of-three match was then played, with the winning team becoming the champion.

If I had to guess the last word to make PATA the champion it would be TEAM, standing for Together Each Achieves More. Most of us spent a lot of time in our youth playing in teams, whether at school or in sports. Some of those teams played together very well and we learned that a good team was able to achieve something that none of the individuals could have done on her or his own.

Regardless of our past experiences it seems that in PATA International, as well as in the PATA Chapter world, most members seem to forget these famous words: "Don't ask what PATA can do for you, but what you can do for PATA."

An association is like a computer. You only get value for money if you put some effort into learning how to use the 'systems', whether they are computer programmes or committees.

In some sports teams, such as tennis and fencing, individuals function quite independently. They may practice together and help each other to perfect their techniques, but there is no real need for coordination of efforts.

Other sport teams, like soccer, rugby and hockey, require a great deal of interface and harmonization; players must communicate constantly and be able to 'forecast' the other player's moves.

The behaviour of many PATA members reminds me of the following story about four individuals: Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an essential task to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Anybody could have completed it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry with that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody considered Anybody could do it, but Nobody recognised that Everybody wouldn't do it. The outcome was that Everybody blamed Somebody when in reality Nobody asked Anybody.

The days are over when one "godfather" managed the whole organisation. Now is the time to put multiple focuses on people, places, products and promotions without segmenting the organisation.

Daily pressures, deadlines and crises make teamwork a minor priority and although a lot of lip service is being paid during the various board meetings, few members talk the talk and walk the walk. Still, the message is clear. In this day and age we are all dependent on other human beings with the supplementary skills to create the results needed in our wonderful Association. This requires an investment in human capital that goes way beyond the yearly 'oh, let's meet twice a



year' approach and needs a systematic and professional attitude.

One such example are the members of the PATA Rapid Recovery Taskforce who "Skype-meet" every second Friday and are investing some of their skills and experiences to make the tourism world a little bit safer through pro-active education and reactive communication.

Another example is the joint efforts of Thailand's Skai Club, Joint Foreign Chambers of Commerce and the PATA Chapter to organise a conference and brainstorm where all tourism stakeholders had a chance to share their thoughts with the leaders of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), thus establishing the kind of teamwork that makes or breaks a destination.

There are many members who have the luxury of experience and the wealth of academic competence to help PATA become a leader in its own right, which requires the foresight of a few to invest in education and training before the return will become visible.

Recent developments in the sport world should be a mirror for our industry, where teams are the winners, individual stars are the losers. Then we won't hear last words, like from Jack Daniel in 1911: "One last drink, please."

Therefore, to any members seeing PATA's future as bleak and hopeless, if we work with the members and the staff as a team, both in "big and small" PATA, we will never experience defeat. And we, the constructive members in our association, will be able to say to the doomsayers: "If you want the last word, bite your tongue."

May this "Last Word" help you to realise, once again, that Together Each Achieves More!

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