

COMMENTARY

Executive Director or President/CEO: Titles Make a Difference in Perception, Legality



Dave Kilby

we embarked on an effort to encourage chambers to adopt corporate titles for

Approximately 20 years ago, the leadership of W.A.C.E. noticed there was absolutely no consistency in titles for the chief staff person in chambers of commerce in the West and

officers and chief paid executives.

Today we are happy to report that only 22% of chamber executives in W.A.C.E. have the title of executive director.

The vast majority of the chambers in W.A.C.E. now use corporate titles. In these chambers, the chief elected volunteer serves as chairman of the board and the chief paid executive has the title of president and/or chief executive officer.

The Voice of Business

We believe that changing to these titles is a huge step in the right direction that will help distinguish chambers from other not-for-profits and charitable groups (where the title executive director is routinely used for the chief staff person). A chamber of commerce is not “just another nonprofit”—it’s the voice of business and, in the opinion of W.A.C.E., we need to look, act and be run like a business, including the titles of our officers and staff executives. Businesses are not run by executive directors; they are run by presidents, board chairs and boards of directors. We feel the same should be true for chambers of commerce.

We also believe that changing the title of a chamber’s chief staff executive to president/CEO will help establish a stronger, more professional chamber image in the press and the business community—especially when the chambers are involved in economic development and public policy issues.

Perception Can Be Reality

It’s not fair, but I’ve been told more

than once by elected officials and business leaders that they believe an executive director needs to get permission and direction from a board of directors, while a president/CEO seems to have the authority to make decisions and run the business/chamber.

In addition, Sacramento Attorney Mark Alcorn reminded me that the term executive director lacks legal significance, and that many government agencies and commercial firms refuse to accept the signature of an executive director on routine documents and contracts.

Latest Chapter

A few weeks ago, I received a call from a person who would be heading up the search to replace the chamber’s longtime president/CEO. As the conversation proceeded, it was apparent that this chamber was thinking of announcing that it was looking for an executive director. I advised that doing so would be a step backward and could even send the wrong impression about the chamber.

It’s OK that my counsel and advice is not always followed, but sometimes I think that people can’t handle the truth. One thing I do know is that for me, silence is not always golden and when I speak my piece, I sleep better at night and, at my age, that’s important.

Dave Kilby is president and CEO of W.A.C.E. and executive vice president of corporate affairs at the California Chamber.

2015–2016 W.A.C.E. OFFICERS

Chairman of the Board

Mike Varney

Tucson Metro (AZ) Chamber
(523) 792-2250 • mvarney@tucsonchamber.org

Chairman-Elect

Nancy Lindholm, ACE

Oxnard (CA) Chamber
(805) 983-6118 • n.lindholm@oxnardchamber.org

Vice Chairman

B Gorman, ACE

Lake Tahoe South Shore (CA/NV) Chamber
(775) 588-1728 • bgorman@tahoechochamber.org

Vice Chairman

Jeremy Harris

Long Beach Area (CA) Chamber
(562) 436-1251 • jharris@lbchamber.org

Vice Chairman

Ermina Karim

San Luis Obispo (CA) Chamber
(805) 781-2670 • ermina@slochamber.com

Vice Chairman

Todd Sanders

Greater Phoenix (AZ) Chamber
(602) 495-2195 • tsanders@phoenixchamber.com

Past Chairman

Tom Pierson, ACE

Tacoma-Pierce County (WA) Chamber
(253) 627-2175 • tomp@tacomachamber.org

Published by: Western Association of Chamber Executives, P.O. Box 1736, Sacramento, CA 95812-1736 (916) 442-2223, Fax (916) 444-6685. Website: www.waceonline.com

Opinions expressed in articles are those of the author and not W.A.C.E.

Chairman’s Circle

Gold Members

- CalChamber
- Chamber Office Depot Program/ Benefits Corporation
- Google
- Sempra Energy
- WebLink International

The Chairman’s Circle is a special group of members that have committed to support W.A.C.E. through sponsorships.

If your business would like to become a member of the Chairman’s Circle, please contact Dave Kilby, W.A.C.E. president and CEO, at (916) 930-1202 or email dave.kilby@calchamber.com.