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Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Welcome to the Stronger by Association podcast. This podcast will share stories about how associations are solving problems in the United States and around the world. This is brought to you by American Society of Association Executives, ASAE, a membership organization of more than 46,000 association professionals, industry partners in the United States and 50 countries. Our members make the world safer, better and smarter.

Welcome to the Stronger by Association podcast. In today's episode, we are going to talk about the power of our profession and the benefits of working in the association community. We have a wide variety of guests that will bring them to light from talking about diversity and inclusion to training the workforce to the mission-driven aspect of associations. Thanks so much for listening, and now we'll get into our first interview. I'm now pleased to welcome Susan Robertson, CAE, president and CEO of ASAE. Susan, good morning, welcome.

Susan Robertson, CAE:

Hi, Mary Kate, it's a pleasure to be here.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Thanks so much for joining and talking about the association community, how you got into it, how it's evolved in your time. Can you tell us how you first got into associations?

Susan Robertson, CAE:

Well, I don't think that I'm at all unique here, but I'll tell my story. I think there are millions of association professionals, and I think the vast majority happened into this work without planning to do so. For me, I had returned to the Washington Area, and I responded to an advertisement in the Washington Post not even knowing it was an association. I joined the National Office Products Association staff as a coordinator of program development. I honestly did not know what it was like to work for an association. To me, it was just a workplace, a job. I was at that point of my career.

But once I learned what the association was all about, and how to work in an association, I stayed there for, Gosh, six years, which at that point in my career was a pretty long time. I took a dip back into the for profit world and a publicly traded company, which was great. But then after that, I landed back at ASAE, back in the association world, that was more than 20 years ago. Applying my for profit experience with nonprofit experience happened to come at the right time with ASAE, but I quickly learned that ASAE was much more than I thought at face value. I was the vice president of marketing communications. But I was part of an organization that represents so many professions and so many industries, and a community that does so much good.

It doesn't take very long when you work for ASAE to catch the bug of how great associations are and how important the work that they do is to advance society, to solve really complex problems. We represent the association community, every profession, and every industry that you can think of. So, how varied is that work? How diverse is the work that associations do? By just appreciating that and

knowing that there's such a rich career available, by working in associations, whether you work in one or several, it's a rewarding thing.

It frustrates me sometimes, when I'm speaking I have hundreds of people in the room, it doesn't matter how many, if I ask the question, "How many of you started out your career by thinking that you would be an association professional?" And it's crickets, no one really, maybe you might see a hand or two. So I think we all fall into this. The frustrating part is that young people who are starting out in their careers, and so many are driven by missions and cause-related important work, they only knew about associations as viable employers and a place where they can grow their careers. I'm hoping that over time, we'll be able to get that message across, but we're just beginning now, and it's such a great work. I could go on, but I'll stop there. Hope that answers your question.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Absolutely. That's so much of our work, is trying to get the [Hill 00:04:35] and outside audiences to think of associations as a community. We bring the numbers, more than 60,000 associations, more than 200,000 American workers and 18 billion in payroll. Absolutely to your point, we never learned about associations in college or think about it as a career path. But if we can get people to see us as the community that's helping drive the economy and train the workforce, I think that will grow definitely.

Susan Robertson, CAE:

Absolutely. I agree. I think one of the things that people don't know about associations, the things that hit the headlines like lobbying and so forth, it's important work, certainly we want to influence public policy. But at the same time going above and beyond that, I think that's what associations do. Their true impact on society, as you mentioned, Mary Kate. What makes that possible is that we bring deep subject matter expertise, and research to any issue that you can think of.

Our memberships are deep, they are our resources, and we bring all of those assets, all of those resources to bear. When we try to solve the world's really complex problems, we've got a lot that we're facing here in U.S. but associations are all around the world, and they're doing that kind of work all around the world. The most recent example of the pandemic is a good example of how associations came to the forefront, and really represented science, represented how we can promote safety and secure or actually assure safety. We educated the public, we helped affected communities.

I think the other part of it too is that, associations provided a professional home for our frontline health care workers. If you want to talk about people, just in the moment, and just exhausting themselves to have a source of information and direction through an association for your profession, I think mental work, those associations through this pandemic affair were very well because their value to their members was so evident, and it was really brought to bear in the crucible of the pandemic, but I think it will be a lasting value. We all learned lessons during the pandemic about how to help our members, but those particularly who are on the frontline, I think, learned some lessons.

There are countless examples through time where associations have come to the aid of a situation or advanced applause or done really important work that makes positive change in the world and in our country. I touched on this a moment ago, but the other thing that I don't think people know as much about is the role that associations play in shaping public policy. Going back to the idea that we have deep expertise, and deep experience and knowledge of an issue, our lawmakers can't know everything about every issue that confronts them, and it's just logical and useful for them to turn to associations to educate them.

And you may not agree with every issue, or you may take a stand in one direction or another, but you can count on the fact that there's an association that represents that point of view, or has expertise to that point of view, and doesn't, it just make good sense for the government to turn to us, to educate them, and to make them aware of the potential impact of policy on an organization or professional or on people. I think that's where we really come in and say, "If you do this, this is what will happen." So, the mutual goal is to develop really responsible and thoughtful public policy, and we have a real role in that.

The other thing I will just mention is that, we do that by building consensus, and association serve, I think, is a model for how to build consensus and take in all points of view, and solve problems together, and actually celebrate different points of view. I'm hoping that we can lend that as a constructive lesson on how our government might operate going forward, so that we can solve problems that really need to be addressed today. So, I get that associations are models for that.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Absolutely. You think about, there's so much turnover between presidential administrations between Hill staff, the associations are the institutional memory to bring the expertise from every industry and profession and help inform public policy in that way.

Susan Robertson, CAE:

I think that's a really good point, because we are the constant, our expertise, our deep knowledge, our membership doesn't change. But as you say, there could be a lot of volatility in other areas, and we can be that true north that helps keep people informed and on the right track to responsible public policy, and that's a really critical role that we play, that's very different from lobbying. When associations [inaudible 00:09:26] six organizations get cast as lobbying organizations are from it, there's a substructure to the work that we do that is so informative and so directive of policy being shaped for people and for things that really matter to our country, and that's, I think, the most important role in that arena for associations.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

You talked a bit about the mission-driven aspect of associations, and that seems to appeal so much to millennials of younger generations. So, can you share about why folks should consider working in associations if they're driven by those types of ideals?

Susan Robertson, CAE:

Yeah, I don't know of a person, let's put it this way, I don't know of a person in my community that doesn't care about a mission or cause regardless of age, but I do think, as you point out, Mary Kate, it's increasingly important to younger people who are starting new careers to find work that has meaning. All these hours that I put in every day, all this thought, all this effort has some benefit other than profit, not to say that profit isn't good, it is good. I think associations are particularly well positioned to attract younger people into a new career in association management, or in working for an association, because of the fact that we are mission-driven.

When you look across all associations and realize that we're representing all industries and professions, there's such a wide variety to choose from, regardless of what you believe in or what's important to you, you're bound to find an association that does that kind of work. And then all of a sudden, you find yourself surrounded by colleagues who are working towards that very same mission.

It's very purposeful, it's very intentional work, and I think incredibly important for associations to be under the noses of younger professionals as they make their career choices. We've done a lot in that direction, that's just a ripple in the water right now. But the more collectively we focus on attracting other people into our professional, the more vitality the association community is going to have going forward.

So, it just allows a lot of choices. I know a lot of people like us who have developed skills in one profession or industry that landed in that association. Well, younger professionals who are just finding out what interests [inaudible 00:11:49] from one association to the other until they find that home, where the mission really matches their values and what's important to them, and dig in and do that work. So, I think that's a very fortunate benefit of working for associations.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Susan, with so many years leaving ASAE and the association community, are there elements of association professional that you've recognized that are different benefits than when you first joined?

Susan Robertson, CAE:

Yeah, yes. With a lot of years in the association space behind me and around me, I think the thing that I didn't anticipate, and it doesn't happen overnight is the relationships in community that you build. That is, personally professionally gratifying. But it's also a very much a part of the fabric of associations, that community that we have around a profession or an industry is absolutely vital to making that industry or profession come alive, and be in the lives of people every day, there are so many really smart and talented, and people who are passionate about the work that they do for associations, those happens to be my colleagues, my community, and it's forever inspiring.

When I think about the opportunity that each of us has as professional individuals, to be exposed to new ideas and to people that we've never dreamed that we would need, most associations have big meetings, we have big speakers, we get to hear big thoughts from really amazing people. Just that exposure makes the work in associations incredible, but it also, I think, affects the direction of a community and what binds us together because we believe in the things that each other believes, and I think that makes us very close.

The other thing I'd say that people don't realize about associations, and I don't mean this in a frivolous or cavalier sort of way is that it's fun. The work is just what I described, thinking about hearing from the latest thinkers or politicians or to be exposed to content of ideas and experiences that you never dreamed you would, is fun work. Generally, people who work for associations have a common interest and passion about a profession or an industry, and so, if you stand shoulder to shoulder with people who believe in what you're doing, and do the kind of work that can be fun and so rewarding at the same time, and I don't think people know that.

The last point I make and I think this is essential for younger professionals to consider. You don't really know until you get into association work what it's like to work with volunteers. When you do work in a for profit entity, your volunteers, your endgame, your customers, right, and to get more customers and to serve their needs, but when you work with volunteers, you do work that moves the mission forward, and that's very different. I think the skill of volunteer management at outcomes is one that, once you have it, you don't lose it and it applies to so many things. It can apply to your personal life for heaven's sakes, but it also applies to how effective and association professional you're.

We get our work done with and through other people who are passionate about the same things we are, who are not on our staff. That takes a minute to understand. But once you do understand

it, I think it's limitless possibilities, because you're drawing on a pool of talent, that is events and deep, and I think that's really exciting, that maybe not obvious benefit of working for an association. I also want to mention the work that we do in workforce development as not being at the forefront of what people might think association work is. Just cutting to the chase, I think very few people know that post college associations are the number one providers of health education.

And in the crisis that we're seeing in employment, post pandemic, the role that we play in skilling up, reskilling and creating an educated and prepared workforce can't be understated. I think we understand diversity is important that there's a lot of injustice in the way in which jobs are distributed and rewarded, organizational culture is important. These are all real areas of expertise for association. So the work we're doing there, I think, will begin to be more visible as the workforce issues that we face down the line become more apparent. So, just putting in a good word for associations in that arena. I didn't want to leave that on set. So thank you for the extra time.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Absolutely. I think we're really looking forward to The Power of A Awards Winners this year, because we'll see tangible stories of all the topics you mentioned, workforce development, diversity, inclusion, COVID relief. I think that'll be a really great night for associations.

Susan Robertson, CAE:

I think it'll make everyone feel so proud of the work of associations and our community. I agree, it is going to be a powerful night, and it'll be a night of community as well. So yes, well said.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Thank you so much for joining us, Susan.

Susan Robertson, CAE:

My pleasure.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

I'm now pleased to welcome two very familiar faces to association executives, Tonya Muse, FASAE, CAE, Partner, U.S. Corporate and Government Affairs Industrial Practices at Odgers Berndtson, and Jim Zaniello, FASAE, president, Vetted Solutions. They're both very experienced in association professionals recruiting, and Tonya most recently was executive director at the Council of Manufacturing Associations at NAM. So thank you both for joining us this morning.

Jim Zaniello, FASAE,:

Thank you for having us.

Tonya W. Muse, FASAE, CAE:

Thank you, glad to be here.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

So, if we think back to a year and a little bit ago, in March of 2020, the market was crashing, associations were very concerned about the future. Then a few months later, a lot of associations had to make cuts,

and now, if we fast forward, it seems like we're in an entirely different environment, and there's a lot of hiring and struggle for talent and competition. So, I'm curious to hear now that we're almost on the other side of the pandemic, what are you seeing in the association sector?

Jim Zaniello, FASAE,:

A lot of recruiting for CEOs, a lot of recruiting for chief revenue officers, regardless of what title they use, whether that's business development, fundraising or something else. Certainly a lot of communications execs to tell the story of the association in the industry, and we're also seeing associations recruiting a lot of interim execs, whether that's the CEO or some important see sweet spot. The interim exec is being utilized sometimes for the association to think through a new business model. Sometimes it's to get a merger done that they've wanted to for years that they might now be able to with a vacancy in the CEO spot. Tonya?

Tonya W. Muse, FASAE, CAE:

I would agree. Also, there is a lot of hiring of chief diversity officers, chief inclusion officers, because there's a lot of focus on culture and health and well being of your team. So, seeing HR rose, seeing hiring there. I sit in the Corporate Government Affairs Practice, there's a lot of movement there, a lot of people who are focused on government relations to really tell the industry story in and outside of Washington.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

That's very interesting. I'm curious, how did the pandemic impact job opportunities within the association sector?

Tonya W. Muse, FASAE, CAE:

So, when COVID hit, I was still at the National Association of Manufacturers, and we did release a study at that time, where we asked CEOs what they were doing, and there was, as you can imagine, a lot of crisis mode. As associations had a lot of their revenue tied to in person events and trade shows, that revenue was no longer there available to them, and so association executives really had to make some difficult decisions. So, they either had to furlough staff let go or release a lot of staff. Definitely freeze salaries, chief executive officers had to freeze their salaries and bonuses. So there was a lot of change going on, and some really difficult decisions had to be made.

Jim Zaniello, FASAE,:

There was certainly a slight pullback in hiring for the fear of the unknown, and all of the cuts that Tonya just mentioned, as folks started to come to terms with whatever it was we were going through, right, we didn't always know, there began a shift for talent at all levels, but especially at the CEO level, entrepreneurial talent, more innovative talent, talent that had helped organizations look at new business models. This time, you mentioned, the impact of the loss of trade shows or trade show revenues.

Interestingly enough, I think, coming out on the other side, we're seeing associations looking at selling a portion of or all of their trade show to invest that money differently for the future, largely to tell their story. And looking at different ways to expand, probably more to the greater concept of community than membership more than anything.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Yeah.

Tonya W. Muse, FASAE, CAE:

And I would also add to that, that there was a lot of need for experts in digital communications and technology, because there was a big shift as you know, from in person to virtual, and so, the associations really had to get up to speed and have that talent in house to really help them with that shift.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Absolutely, we brought so many of those stories to the Hill to help get associations including the paycheck protection program. I think seeing the really scary numbers about the associations who were worried about exhausting their reserves, furloughing laying off staff is the reason we were included. So, glad to be able to quantify that for the Hill, but I'm really glad to hear how much better things are sounding in the association sector now. What are some of the challenges that are faced by association seeking to hire in this really hot market, especially in DC?

Tonya W. Muse, FASAE, CAE:

So, what I'm seeing now is, there's a lot of focus on workplace culture. So, association executives really need to ask themselves, are they offering adequate work life balance? That has to be first and foremost. Challenges at work space, what that looks like? What does your in office footprint look like? Because a lot of organizations are moving to a hybrid model, where a lot of staff have moved away, and so they might be virtual. So what do you do with this extra space that you potentially could have? Are you providing adequate health care benefits? So taking a look at what you're doing in health care, and a big priority that we're seeing or focus is on the diversity of your staff. So, is your workplace inclusive? And what does your staff demographics look like? Are some of the challenges and issues that association executives should be asking themselves. Jim?

Jim Zaniello, FASAE,:

We see boards grappling now with, "How do we do our CEO interviews? Do we show up even if we're not ready for that all of us? What happens if a candidate's not ready for that?" By and large, I think folks are willing to do what it takes to meet in person as part of the search process, but it almost feels like we're recreating the search process as we did 15 months ago or so. Sometimes that still means more interviews, sometimes it still means more reference checking, to time this point, lots of conversation around culture. How do you virtually onboard a CEO if the organization isn't back in the office or anyone into the organization?

And what are the extra steps you're going to take to ensure that all staff feel together? Cohesive, still able to collaborate, because that's harder if I can't walk down the hall to talk to you, all of us into a meeting room. Yet I think those days are probably gone at some level. We're also seeing CEOs, HR execs and hiring execs say, "Well, do I want the best talent or do I want the best talent in my geography?" Meaning, "Can I hire anywhere for the first time in my life, since we didn't need to be in an office?" And so that's having really fun challenges, I think on the hiring equation in our space.

Tonya W. Muse, FASAE, CAE:

To add to that too, the question of bringing back your staff safely is the whole conversation around vaccine and the privacy of, how do you ask if your employees have been vaccinated. So, just taking that

into account, and then during COVID, you lost staff, whether if you are D.C. based, or wherever you might be based, staff moved to be maybe closer to family to help take care of children or parents, and so how can you or how do you bring that staff back into your office in person? Or do you?

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

So we've talked so often, you two, are really living the power of associations? Can you share how you think why it's so great to work in the association community and why people are drawn to it.

Tonya W. Muse, FASAE, CAE:

So for me, I was an association executive for 30 years before I transitioned to executive search, and it was just so important to be a part of a mission and work on a common cause. I'm a servant leader, I enjoy serving others and the member engagement, working for an industry and working for members have just been extremely rewarding for me, and just working on knowing that you're working for an industry that has such impact on this community and society, such an important economic driver, and really at the forefront of innovation and creativity, it's just been extremely rewarding for me.

Jim Zaniello, FASAE,:

It's all about the mission in the association world, the impact that associations have on the industry or profession they serve, the impact they have on the ability to recruit a truly diverse workforce for the industry or profession in addition to the association, quite frankly, what they can help get done, that sometimes governments can't, sometimes corporations can't. That shared mission of an association is truly amazing, and I think that's what draws people to careers in this sector. How could it not?

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Absolutely. Well, thank you both so much for joining us today. It's great to hear about the positive trajectory that we're going on and really the innovation that's happening in associations.

Jim Zaniello, FASAE,:

It's incredible. Thanks for including us.

Tonya W. Muse, FASAE, CAE:

Thank you so much.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

I'm so pleased to welcome Nate Wambold, CMP, Director Meetings and Conferences from the American Anthropological Association. Nate is the chair of ASAE Young Professionals Committee. He is a DELP scholar, and he participated in our NextGen training program. Welcome, Nate.

Nate Wambold, CMP:

Thanks so much. I'm happy to be here.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

So, Nate you've had experience at different associations, can you share the path that took you to your first association job?

Nate Wambold, CMP:

Sure. Like many I run into in this field, I've fell into it rather by accident. I was an intern with the FBI, my junior year of college. So, my senior year of college, I was at a job fair in our gym, talking to some FBI agents, I met them summer before. We were talking about events I had done and outreach to the community I had done, so on and so forth.

As I was wrapping up my conversation and walking away, a woman at the table next to them said, "Hey, do you have a resume? I overheard your conversation." So I handed her a resume. I thought nothing of it, didn't even get the name of the organization. Three days later, I got a call that said, "We'd love to have you come in for an interview." I said, "Great, who are you?" They said, "We're the American Society of Clinical Oncology. We're an organization of cancer doctors, and we're interested in your experience, will you come in and talk to us?"

This was in 2008, when none of my friends were getting jobs anywhere, not to mention a job in your field of study. Three days after that interview, I had a job offer. So, who am I to turn down a job offer as not even yet graduated senior? So I joined an association and I became a meetings professional and that started a wonderful career that to this day I haven't left.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

So, what keeps you working in the association community?

Nate Wambold, CMP:

It's interesting, a lot of people ask that mostly because when I say what I do, people are like, "Well, what is that? What is an association?" We all know how we describe associations, organizations of members all centered around a particular field. I think for me, it's the passion that members bring to the association, the passion they have for what it is they do, the passion for the common ground that unites them. I get to interact with that passion every day, and it's really energizing, and it's really revitalizing when you have a hard day or a hard week. Then you have FaceTime or now in this virtual world, Zoom FaceTime with your members who really love what they do. Is this contagious feeling of excitement about the work you're doing and the benefits you're providing to members?

I often tell my team, we have to think and work like a Fortune 500 company, our detail management, our process efficiency, our business acumen, we have to operate at a level for our members of a Fortune 500 company, but we're a Fortune 500 company that follows a specific targeted mission, and that mission is what unites our members and then must unite our staff. So, it's a really wonderful supportive environment to work in, and it's also a really motivational and energizing environment to work into.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

It reminds me, when Matt Shay from National Retail Federation accepted the Trends Award in 2019, he talks about how great the association community is, because as a young professional you can take on more, build your experience. And he says we get to work here. I think about that a lot for the real enthusiasm that our community has for associations. Can you share some of the professional development that helps you get to the place you are today?

Nate Wambold, CMP:

Sure. I think every industry, whether you're a lawyer, or a doctor, or a teacher, every industry has an association, but most people in those industries don't know that they have an association. For us, those

of us who work in associations, it's the most redundant macro meta thing ever to say I'm an association professional who belongs to an association of association professionals. But ASAE really is that professional development home for me and has been for quite some time, it's not so much about the session you sit in when you go to the annual meeting, although they're amazing, or the webinar you participate in during COVID, online that's hosted by ASAE, although they're amazing.

It's really about this network to community, and how easy you have access to tons of people who are solving the same challenges you at every day, they are brainstorming and collaborating on what's coming at them in the future. ASAE does a really good job of infusing future think into the field. So we're constantly having conversations across associations to our peers, and our mentors, and our direct reports about what's coming next. I think more than Fortune 500 companies, we bring ideas about what's coming next, not because we want to profit off of them, but because we want to be prepared for them, and we want to see our members succeed through them.

So for me, professional development has really been about some of the programs. In the introduction, you said, I've participated in the NextGen program in 2018. I'm a DELP scholar of this most recent class. So yes, there are great programs that support your professional development, but it really is how you connect with the larger community, whether that's on collaborate, on the website, where you can join all these communities and talk to people about specific problems or join communities and people who are like you, whether that's role or regional area of the country. Then networking in person at the events we go to. So I've reached out to my network at ASAE to solve all kinds of problems.

And that really helps you grow as a professional, and I think it gives us a leg up as to some of the other industries that don't really have those tight networks where you can reach out and easily access someone from a different organization doing the same work you're doing.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

That's a great point. That's really the beauty of this association community as people want to help you succeed and share best practices. I think that's why people stay, absolutely. What else would you tell others who don't know about this association committee?

Nate Wambold, CMP:

I think it was shocking to me when I got into it, how I could have missed it. There's an association for everything. Everything from home builders, to transportation experts, to sanitation engineers, to doctors, to lawyers. Every job, every product you interact with, every service you use in your life, the professionals that make those things available to us as consumers, there's an association for them, there's an association that supports them, the work they do, their professional development, their advancement.

So again, to zoom out to that meta level, when you think about your own career, having that kind of support, it's really empowering. So when you work in the association field, and you're providing these benefits to all of these members that you have, you then can sit back at the end of the day and go, "That program that I just did for my members, there's probably one of those for me." And it's this really cool realization to say the work you're doing, there's probably someone else out there doing that work on your behalf, and you're an integral part of that community to understand what those benefits are available to you and how to deliver them to someone else, and it's massive.

There are so many associations out there, and there's associations for literally everything. So you can join one that you're passionate about, or you can join one that you may not be passionate about, but actually develop the passion for and share the passion that your members have as you do

that work. So, that's probably the biggest shock to me when I got into the community, and then just how supportive it is. It's huge, but it's also really small.

Once you're in it for any amount of time, people stay in this community. So, you may have known Joe when he was at XYZ association, but now he's two levels up at a different association. And you run into these people, and it's all one big communal family of people that really care about each other's success. So, it's a secret club, but it's a massive secret club that's all around us, and I don't think most people know about that.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for joining us, and we hope this podcast will help spread the word about the association community, what a great place it is to work and the service you provide to the community.

Nate Wambold, CMP:

Thanks so much. It's been my pleasure to be here.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

I'm now pleased to welcome Jennifer Baker, MSW, CAE, Senior Director of Business Solutions at ASAE Business Services. Welcome, Jennifer.

Jennifer Baker:

Thanks for having me, Mary Kate, I love this topic, and I'm really looking forward to a conversation.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Well, we're so glad to have you talk about association career headquarters and working in the association sector, the types of jobs that are available and the benefits. You really have your finger on the pulse of association careers. Let's start with talking about how the pandemic has impacted association jobs.

Jennifer Baker:

That's a great question. I have to say that, actually, right now we're seeing two good news trends. One is that associations are hiring again. Between March and June of last year, we saw a really hard hiring freeze set in as associations were grappling with the impacts of the pandemic. Starting about mid June last year, we began to see a thaw, and that process has picked up steam since that time, which has been wonderful to see. We are seeing job volume, the number of job postings, the array of job postings expand, and that is a great thing to say.

The other good news is that associations are returning to work literally, as vaccination rates increase and restrictions ease, associations are starting to reopen offices. This is good news because it really points to a renewed confidence among association employers in their business outlook. Now, the workplace won't look exactly the same, just like many other sectors, associations are looking at hybrid workplace models, and allowing folks to have flexibility and work remotely, but there will be some in-office activity. Again, that's good news, because it means people are feeling confident again about the prospects of positive business to come [inaudible 00:38:39] to know it's a tight talent market.

That's something that's been emerging over the past few months, even more than before. It's affecting employers of all kinds, including associations. What it means is that, employers generally speaking are seeing some lower applicant volumes, and they're having to compete more thoughtfully to attract top talent. For a variety of factors, some job seekers are nervous, have health concerns, and others have really started to reassess their priorities and consider more carefully what they want and need in their work life. This is good news for job seekers in this market conditions because it's a great time to apply and to be able to stand out and shine. So, those are some of the trends that I think are of know as we come out of the pandemic.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

So, I'm really glad to hear that the job market is heating up, what types of job opportunities are trending? And what are the skills that those job seekers would need?

Jennifer Baker:

So, associations and other types of nonprofits are really micro to small businesses, and this means that they need every kind of professional to operate successfully. So, as always, associations need an array of talent in fact, ASAE's salary and compensation work has identified 75 job roles within Association. So there's really opportunity across the board. Right now the top five job categories for postings that we've seen here today include positions and membership, marketing, project management and program development, communications and editorial positions and education and training.

So the top five job categories that we're seeing among our postings here today are in the membership area, marketing, project management and program development, communications and editorial, and education and training areas. To date, through 2021, through the end of May, some of the top job titles that we're seeing applications for include jobs like marketing manager, executive director, chief executive officer, and that's great to see, it means that leadership roles are coming available. So there's some exciting opportunities there. Program manager, director of communications and director of education. So this is just a sampling of some of the job titles, as well as some of the job categories that are out there.

In terms of skills, what I'm seeing is acumen, being able to demonstrate that you have the ability to make good judgments and prompt decisions, thoughtful decisions is more important than ever in any role that you're applying for. This includes digital acumen, understanding the technology, landscape, the role it plays, and having facility with various types of technology. Business acumen, understanding both the business model, the organization that you're working for in the larger environment that it's operating in. Project management skills are increasingly important.

I would say, flexibility and comfort with change, and we all know that the last 15 months has been a roller coaster of change. And being able to adapt, being flexible, is really important, because I think that pace of change is only getting faster, and so being able to be comfortable with that is increasingly important as a job skill.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Do you have any advice for people that are looking for new job opportunities?

Jennifer Baker:

Yeah, I love this question, because I think there is, and has never been any silver bullet per se. But there are some core things that you need to know about job searching today, especially for people who may

not have been job searching recently, things have changed. It really requires a disciplined multi pronged approach, and this includes things like making sure your career assets are up to date.

So, this isn't just your resume, it also includes LinkedIn profiles, being sure that if you are active on other social media platforms that you are aware of what's there, that you're using them smartly, and you can use them as a place to position yourself and your professional brand, personal brand, which is another career asset that if you don't have you want to think about and start cultivating and making sure that you are looking at each job carefully and using keywords, skill words as you're applying for those jobs. So it's not a one resume fits all. That's really important to keep in mind, and using your network.

So, applying directly in the channel that an employer has requested is very important. Using job boards and other resources to do that is important, but also networking. If you know somebody at organizations who can put in a good word for you, that can really help today. The two other things I would suggest are, one of the basics, which is prepare. I am always surprised when I interview with folks, and those job seekers clearly haven't really done that much homework. It is so easy with associations. Their websites are full of great information that lets you know what their mission is, their vision, their strategic plan, their staff roster, so much wonderful information. So do your homework, prepare, practice interviewing, it's really important.

Then finally, virtual interviewing, that has obviously been the norm for the last 15 months, and it's actually probably going to continue going forward, and you need to know that many employers are using how you perform in a virtual interview as a proxy for your digital acumen. So, if you are fumbling with your tech, if you are flustered during an interview, virtual interview or not able to present a good visual during that interview, those things are being noted more than ever, especially this far in, when so many people have been operating virtually for so long. So keep that in mind, and there are a lot of great places where you can get virtual interviewing tips.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Thank you, Jennifer, those are really great reminders. So, how can employers and job seekers use CareerHQ?

Jennifer Baker:

Well, I am really glad you asked that, Association CareerHQ, known as a ACHQ for short is the one stop shop for association career and talent management resources. If you go to ASAEcenter.org, and you hit that career tab, you'll be right there, and you can see the array of things we have to offer for people, both who are in active job search mode, or as individuals just looking to manage their career. We have lots of resources, and then of course, for employers who are looking for top talent.

Our focus really continues to be, has always been, providing practical and useful information for both employers and individuals to help them navigate the current environment conditions for talent and for job seeking. So for job seekers, if you want to use our job board, we do have a great job board, and it's free to set up a career center profile, and apply for jobs. We offer a range of a la carte services as well things like resume and LinkedIn, profile writing, career coaching, assessments, and reference checks service. So there are array of supports that can help you as you're in a search or as you're thinking about your career.

For employers, we have an array of recruitment supports, everything from job postings to job posting enhancements, like job posting videos that allow them to do employer branding, to recruitment services, everything from a polish post service that helps polish up job postings to an executive

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recruitment service. So again, visiting ASAecenter.org, selecting that career tab and navigating from there, you'll be able to find all of these services. And of course, we in the career services area are always happy to help so you can reach out at any time.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Thank you so much, Jennifer, this has been so helpful. I really appreciate your time. Is there any other piece of advice you would have for people looking to come to the association community?

Jennifer Baker:

I would say that the association sector is an amazing place to work. It brings you the opportunity to interact with people. In any job that you have, you're going to interact with people on this every day, interesting people, people who are making a difference in the professions and trades that they operate in, and you're helping them do that. Also, you're being exposed to so many opportunities. In my own career, I've been able to travel internationally, I've had the opportunity to run meetings, to learn about contracts, to do business development, work with folks on their career. So, that's just a sampling, and I think the ability to wear a lot of different hats is unique in our sector. I just encourage people to check us out and use Association CareerHQ to do that.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Thank you so much, Jennifer.

Jennifer Baker:

Thanks so much.

Mary Kate Cunningham, CAE:

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Stronger by Association. It was great to talk to a wide variety of guests about the magic of the association community and the careers that are possible. We hope that if you've listened to this episode that you share it with someone who you know who's looking for a career change, and then we can just continue to share the message about positive impacts the association committee has on the economy, society and the great place it is to work. Thank you so much for listening. For more information visit www.thepowerofa.org and stay tuned for more episodes.