

Is Every Day Thanksgiving Day at Your Association?

by Oliver P. Yandle, CAE

Thanksgiving often evokes romantic notions of warm family gatherings, football games on TV or in the backyard, and perfectly prepared, bountiful meals. It is a holiday in which tradition is sacred - particularly when it comes to the Thanksgiving dinner menu.

For about the last 10 years, I have hosted family and friends for Thanksgiving dinner, each year serving almost exactly the same menu prepared almost exactly the same way: oven roasted turkey (brined, of course), cranberry and wild rice stuffing, sweet potato soufflé, green bean casserole, pumpkin pie. And then Scott moved in. As I prepared the menu for our first Thanksgiving together (and the first with our parents), it became clear that my traditional menu was a little different than his. His mom always made a meat and bread stuffing. Thanksgiving wasn't Thanksgiving without his broccoli and rice casserole. And, of course, there had to be mashed potatoes. And apple pie.

So, we did the only thing that made sense - we made it all. Two stuffings, two potatoes, two casseroles, two desserts. Too much food. There wasn't enough room in the oven to cook it all, and the refrigerator couldn't hold all of the leftovers. Some of the items were perfectly cooked, while others didn't fare as well. We tried to do it all, with very mixed results.

Letting go of traditions is hard. In tough times, traditions give us grounding and security. But they can also hold us back and keep us from making hard choices. As association professionals, this is an eternal struggle. History and tradition creates a sense of community within our organizations. But as the needs and wants of members change, our capacity to deliver is often compromised by our inability to let go of programs and services that have outlived their usefulness. The result is that members can feel the same way we do after the Thanksgiving meal -- weighted down and sluggish. How do we get back into shape? Maybe some advice from dieticians can help:

- 1) Use a smaller plate - focus on your organization's core strengths and the areas in which it can deliver the most value.
- 2) Use portion control - don't try to do everything. Do a few things really, really well.
- 3) Exercise - continuously look for new and more efficient ways to deliver value to your members and shake up your routines to keep your association in top condition.

So, as we plan this year's Thanksgiving, Scott and I are doing things a little differently. We'll keep a few traditional items, but also try out some new recipes that incorporate ingredients that everyone seems to like. We'll try to avoid seconds, but not the gym. And we'll focus on the stuff that really matters - sharing time with family and friends, and being thankful for all of the blessings we've been afforded. Have a great Thanksgiving!

