



Council for  
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## Our Profession and our Association: A Powerful Bond

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**E**volutionary theory suggests that humans are best equipped for survival by functioning in groups. Groups allow for critical support mechanisms that increase the chance of continuing existence. Groups consist of individuals interacting and socializing with each

other because they have a shared identity and goals. Similarities in a group form a common identity and contribute to the group dynamics. The cohesiveness of the group depends on the desire of the individuals in the group to sustain the identity and accomplish the group's common goals.

A fundamental sense of well-being is derived from the conscious experience of belonging. Striving to belong and to a lesser extent, having power or influence, are core concepts in social motivation studies.<sup>1</sup> Social motivation research focuses on the intrapersonal and interpersonal needs of individuals and how they translate these needs into goals. These studies show a sense of belonging provides meaning, context, and value in our lives. Identifying with individuals who have like characteristics provides a feeling of comfort and security that may not be found in other ways. It creates energy and a bond of community; an environment where people feel valued and connected.

### When a Group Becomes a Profession

A group of individuals who share distinct knowledge and interact with each other often becomes legitimized as a profession when the group's contributions are acknowledged by other groups.

Often, a profession holds an exclusive body of knowledge that has high social value. This knowledge is gained through extensive schooling, requires lifelong learning, and is used to serve the public good. The evolution of a profession is dependent on its individual members who share a common background in a particular career area.

Part of the definition of a "professional" is to have an association, which establishes, reinforces, promotes, and sustains the professional role and status.

Typically nonprofit, cooperative, and voluntary, these organizations exist to serve their members, providing professional development activities, networking, and social events. They also compile and disseminate information about the field and may lobby for legislation that is sympathetic to their particular cause.

Professionals are held to high ethical standards and are expected to guarantee the competence of their members to protect the public. Professions are assumed to be autonomous. Thus, they are self-governing, public institutions granted special rights to serve public

needs. A profession without self-direction lacks the ability to establish the resources necessary for members to acquire prestige and socioeconomic rewards.

Professionalism is grounded in the belief that common ideals and values bind the practitioners and enhance each person's sense of well-being.<sup>2</sup> When groups of professionals commit to a collective ideal, explicit bonds develop. Professional societies preserve the art; enhance the science; serve as a point of reinforcement and of rejuvenation; and promote career satisfaction and well-being.

### Professional Bond

Nurse anesthesia is a well-respected profession, largely due to the strong, resilient foundations of education and practice established by the AANA. Integral to the Association are professionalism, collegiality, and belonging; a culture of shared values that balances individuality, respect, and a profound sense of identity and well-being; and a cultural understanding of the value the professional organization resources bring to each individual and their ability to practice.

Structural cohesiveness is a key element in any culture and is a dominant value for nurse anesthetists, as confirmed by a high percentage of membership in the AANA. In her dissertation work, Betty Horton, CRNA, DNSc, clearly identifies nurse anesthesia as a subculture of nursing in which a distinctive mode of self-identification as a CRNA is supported by strong ties to involvement in the profession.<sup>3</sup> There is great pride in and a demonstration of commitment to the profession. This commitment of passion and mutual understanding creates a strong link of individuality and connectedness, and contributes to an overall sense of well-being within the group. Horton's observations note that solidarity is fostered by cooperation and interdependence, perceptions of strength in numbers, and belonging to a group that will "close ranks" to protect shared beliefs.

Although culture plays a significant role in the Association decision-making processes, nurse anesthetists recognize and value the individual right to speak out. There is also pride in accomplishment for self and others supported by strong interest in serving as leaders in the organization and celebrations of recognition.

The socialization process for nurse anesthesia professional membership is dynamic. Students are mentored and encouraged; members are continually supported with opportunities for professional education and leadership growth. Attending meetings, volunteering and collaborating with other members, and the prevalence of equal power build a powerful network of lifelong communication, interaction, and a degree of connectedness.

### Why Join?

Individuals join groups for many different reasons. People join organ-

*Coming together is a beginning.  
Keeping together is success.*

*Henry Ford.*

izations with expectations about what membership will be like, what they expect to receive in return for their efforts, even what they plan to give the organization in return. They join because they share common goals, there are rewards from being in a group, and the individual's role in a group is important to the group.

Observations show individuals join the AANA because it is a strong culture, reinforced by meeting member expectations and encouraging direct involvement in the decision-making process. The beliefs, values, and assumptions that make up the culture are both intense and pervasive across the organization. The majority of the members support the culture, providing great consensus concerning what the organization is about and what it stands for. Sharing these core values facilitates coordination of activities, communication, and conflict resolution, and contributes to financial success and organizational effectiveness.

Strong cultures based on a balance of individuality and togetherness can also lead to infighting, secrecy, and paranoia that may redirect valuable time and resources. Such cultures can threaten organizational stability and effectiveness, affects the ability to innovate, and makes it resistant to change.

### Meeting the Challenge of Change

Although there are conflicting objectives for members of any association, there is also a need for new and fresh ideas to cope with challenges. An organization needs to adapt appropriately to change, adjust individual preferences to majority decisions, sustain member satisfaction, and address overriding concerns in order to ensure the continued functioning and well-being of the group.

The capacity of an association to develop and grow depends on the ability of the members to respond to change—to adopt innovative practices that meet new challenges. In today's world tremendous environmental pressures affect the nature of professional work. Technological change is narrowing expertise and promoting greater specialization. Labor market changes are reducing job security. Regulatory changes are reducing professional control over job content. Members are becoming concerned about the effects of healthcare cost, challenges to professional integrity, equitable compensation for the quality of their professional work, and the threat of their specialty "losing ground." Areas of knowledge and practice that used to be the domain of the anesthesia specialty are now

being claimed by other disciplines.

The most important challenge facing the profession in the next five years, or even the next 20 years, is not so much losing members; the real problem is losing the desire, passion, and involvement to sustain ourselves as a profession. Threats certainly exist, including: complacency and acceptance of the status quo in education and practice; waning interest in serving the profession as leaders, teachers, and mentors; lack of participation in elections and professional meetings; and apathetic regard for professional identity.

Sustaining individual welfare often depends on the group. The critical benefit of gathering people together to keep something in existence and of keeping it from failing during stress or difficult times is togetherness and a renewed sense of belonging—of standing with those who can make a difference.

### The Bond that Connects

Education and practice are the foundation—the roots—that anchor the profession. Supporting members and protecting patients is the core of the Association. It is the bond of membership, mutual respect, and sense of identity that creates greater energy, passion, excitement, and engagement, a synergism that weaves together past accomplishments and the conventional boundaries of what we know today, and sets our course for what we need to do for tomorrow. It is a powerful bond! ■

### References

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