



Cocreating ASWB's future



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In the January/February issue of *association news*, ASWB President Tim Brown shared with you his excitement about helping to lead ASWB through a formal strategic planning process in 2018 that will “guide us into a social work regulatory future filled with many new opportunities.”

In this issue, I will share how a serendipitous stop at an airport bookstore led me to a book and a philosophy that can amplify our strategic planning efforts when embraced and put into action.

As the newly elected Board of Directors and staff were beginning our year of work together, we also were engaged in hiring the consultant who will be our partner and collaborator through the strategic planning process. One of his first responsibilities was to develop a timeline of activities needed to develop our plan in time for it to be introduced at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Delegate Assembly. The first strategic planning step with membership will take place at the 2018 Education Conference: a focus group session where we gather your input to begin the process of identifying the trends and issues that you predict will be important as we navigate the as-yet uncharted regulatory waters in our future.

Those of you who attended the 2017 Annual Meeting of the Delegate Assembly will recall that I introduced the theme that would guide ASWB in 2018: “Anticipate!” I spoke of thinking ahead and bringing foresight into our conversations to inform creative solutions to anticipated and unanticipated problems. I said that the only way we can be prepared to respond in the present is if we are anticipating and imagining the future and gearing up to respond in creative, bold ways. ... ways that make sense, manage risk, and align with our values, responsibilities, and relationships.

It was when I was leaving that meeting that serendipity—or synchronicity—led me to *The Anticipatory Organization: Turn Disruption and Change into Opportunity and Advantage* by Daniel Burrus. I knew this was a book that I had to read. Burrus is a well-known and well-respected strategist whose methodologies and innovative thinking have turned businesses around and, more importantly, taught business leaders how to anticipate a positive future. Two ideas that he wrote about will contribute perspective and, I believe, add power to our ongoing strategic thinking: “Understanding Hard Trends and Soft Trends” and “adopting a robust Futureview®.”

These concepts are important to the success of our strategic planning, and I will summarize them here.

Hard Trends and Soft Trends

Burrus describes an anticipatory organization as one that “applies the methodology of separating Hard Trends that *will* happen from Soft Trends that *might* happen to its innovation and decision-making processes (p. 167).” He explains that a **Hard Trend** is a future fact that provides certainty, i.e., it *will* happen. It is based on “measurable, tangible, and fully predictable facts, events, or objects (p. 174).” We cannot stop Hard Trends from happening, but we can *anticipate* how to see them coming. Burrus challenges us to identify and “pre-solve” the predictable problems indicated by Hard Trends and to keep our eyes open to creatively manage the future opportunities as well.

Burrus states that Hard Trends fall into three primary categories:

- **Technology:** Artificial intelligence, the use of the cloud, wearables for remote medical diagnostics, and social technologies are some examples of hard trends—not temporary fads—that will continue to grow in importance at exponential rates.
- **Demographics:** As 78 million U.S. baby boomers continue to age, predictable problems and as-yet unimagined opportunities will develop, according to Burrus. Millennials want to learn and work in different ways.
- **Government regulation:** Government regulation will expand in the future, not

“ Knowledge increases in value when it’s shared....There’s power in sharing and cocreating. And that engenders trust ”
(Burrus, p. 153).

lessen, he predicts and gives as examples increasing regulation around cybersecurity, environmental protection, and the use of autonomous vehicles, drones, and recording wearables.

A **Soft Trend** is a future “maybe,” a thing that may happen based on plausible statistical information, assumptions, or “gut instinct.” But a Soft Trend is not a future fact by Burrus’s definition. According to him, we can often change or influence a Soft Trend, which is why it is risky to count on Soft Trends continuing. Interestingly, in 2017, Burrus wrote, “We can assume that Facebook will remain a major player in social media (p. 23).” Welcome, Mark Zuckerberg, to your current future!

Other examples of Soft Trends that Burrus points to include:

- The continuation of Bitcoin as the dominant cybercurrency (although any company’s success depends on leadership and vision).
- The rise and predicted growth of obesity in the United States. Burrus posits, however, that government, businesses, and individuals can focus on changing this trend rather than preparing to pay for the expense of future health complications from obesity.

Following Burrus’s model, ASWB will be anticipating the Hard and Soft Trends facing both the regulatory community and the social work profession to inform and guide our strategic thinking and planning. The upcoming focus group is a starting point for capturing these trends.

Futureview

Burrus’s Futureview principle (a term he has trademarked) states: “How you view the future shapes your actions today, and your actions today will shape your future (p. 173).” Futureview is a powerful principle both for individuals and for organizations. Following the principle: If the prevailing Futureview is positive, then the organization’s stakeholders will reflect greater motivation, engagement, and involvement. Burrus theorizes that a negative Futureview results from looking at the future with “yesterday’s thinking” rather than understanding the Hard and Soft Trends of the future. He encourages readers to elevate their view of the future and share it with all stakeholders to “maintain alignment of purpose and a shared mindset (p. 103).”

Putting *The Anticipatory Organization* in action

The title of the book’s final chapter is “Direct Your Future or Someone Else Will.” Here Burrus encourages organizations to include

all stakeholders in the strategic thinking and planning process so that they are collaborating and “cocreating a future together.”

It is in this spirit of cocreation that we are conducting the focus groups and involving members, ASWB staff, and stakeholders representing the other pillars of the social work profession—practice and education—to be part of ASWB’s strategic planning process. Everyone at the education conference for Thursday’s preconference meetings (May 17) will be included in the focus group activity. We will get under way at 8:30 a.m. Bring your ideas about our shared future. If you are not attending, I encourage you to send [me](#) a list of Hard and Soft Trends you see on the horizon, as well as your Futureview of ASWB. Your ideas and perspective are critical to helping “guide us into a social work regulatory future filled with many new opportunities.”

Futureview: Timeline for strategic planning

ASWB chose our strategic planning consultant, Paul D. Meyer from Tecker International, LLC, because his philosophy resonates with ASWB’s management approach/philosophy of **planning and thinking strategically** at all times so that our decisions are mission-focused, outcomes-driven, values-based, as well as future-oriented. He is collaborating with staff and Board members to engage our member boards and critical stakeholders in crafting a comprehensive strategic direction that answers two important questions:

- How will social work regulatory boards, the licensure process, and the social work regulatory community (including educators, students, practitioners, employers, and regulators) be affected because of the work of ASWB over the next three years?
- What impact will our shared view of the future that we create together have on ASWB?

Over the next eight months, ASWB will carry out a rigorous strategic planning process. The time frame and steps are outlined here:

- April – All-staff survey
- May – Member focus group at the education conference
- June – Stakeholder interviews
- July – Staff leadership team planning meeting
- August – ASWB Board of Directors planning session
- September/October – Strategic plan drafted and refined
- November – Strategic plan adopted by ASWB Board of Directors and presented to the Delegate Assembly

Stay tuned for updates!