

## RUSSELL GROSSMAN INAUGURAL SPEECH – IABC AGM June 10, 2014

Hello everyone.

Eleven years ago, I was in this very hotel for the 2003 IABC International Conference.

It had been a difficult conference that year because of SARS - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome - a viral respiratory disease which had infected people in 37 countries in early 2003 - and Toronto had been one of those cities with an outbreak.

The Torontonians rallied round however and as usual the conference was a huge success. It was my first visit then to this beautiful city and this is now my fifth or sixth.

2003 was only my second visit to IABC International Conference – this year is my 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive occasion.

In those 13 years, the world has changed – and so too has the Conference; as it will continue to do, to respond to needs of both our members and the practitioners and businesses who don't yet take advantage of IABC and its services.

More about that in a little while.

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### ***Thanks for those who brought me to this point***

First I want to recognise, and thank, all those who have brought me to this day. I stand before you today with a great deal of humility and pride, and I want to call out the many people who have helped bring me to this place.

I've been deeply touched, and hugely impressed, by the quality and camaraderie of the people with whom I have had the privilege to work these past three years that I've been on the International Executive Board, and by the support and encouragement I've received from them.

I especially want to recognise the inspiration and leadership of three recent past Board members who are all some of the best Chairs IABC has not yet had.

Barbara Fagan-Smith ABC, Michelle Bernhardt and Kristen Sukalac ABC. Ladies, when someone tweets this remark to you, please consider stepping forward in the future.

I must also especially mention some past Chairs who have inspired me to the point I've reached today.

**John Clemons ABC, IABC Fellow**, who was Chair the first year I joined IABC in 2002 and I thought – wow, I'm glad I don't have that job.

**Warren Bickford ABC**, who first approached me in the men's lavatory at the Ian Potter Centre in Melbourne in November 2005 and suggested I should run for the Board. I laughingly said I might think about it one day.

**Glenda Holmes ABC** who made the same suggestion the following year in a more gender neutral setting, and whom I gently rebuffed.

**Mark Schumann ABC** who finally did hook me in, under the subterfuge of asking me to be the chair for World Conference for two years. And that left.....

**Adrian Cropley ABC**, to seal my fate in finally encouraging me to put forward my nomination as a member of the Board.

But I will forgive Adrian, for it was he who first introduced me to my favourite foreign City – which is, of course, Melbourne – which I first went to in the selfsame 2005 and where I've been many times since, including to my favourite spot on the globe - which is the left hand bench outside the Langham hotel on the south side of the Yarra, gazing towards Flinders Street station.

Amazingly, one of our friends back home actually has that very scene painted in an artwork on her wall.

Adrian has always amazed and inspired me with his remarkable resilience - which not only got him through the tough issues he sorted for IABC three years ago but saw him arrive at this Conference on Friday following a 30 hour flight from Singapore via Sydney (Adrian, honestly, that's not the route I personally would have recommended) and straight into leading the four hour orientation for our new Board members last Saturday morning.

Adrian is now leading the committee which is launching the IABC Academy – the new training and development arm of IABC. The Academy is spreading our professional rigour creed into the profession at large and will bring in both new revenue and increased reputation for the Association.

I mention **Kerby Meyers**, who accosted me with a Denver salutation in November 2012 while I was sitting on the that, my favourite bench, on the south bank of the Yarra and who famously “got shit done” in shovelling more really tough issues in 2013.

And of course I mention our outgoing (in many more ways than one) **Robin McCasland**, passing Chair, who in this last year has managed to complete the triptych of tough times in the triennial triumvirate of past Chairs, which IABC has needed to see it through.

“Robin McCasland”. Just saying her name makes people smile.

Robin is a real Mensch. She sees the best in everything and everybody. She is a true role model not only in how she has conducted herself as Chair, but in her achievements and legacy : in chapter support; in setting IABC on the path to a new brand; and in ensuring the mechanism has been in place to continue a strategic path for the next few years.

Robin, we give you back to your partner Mitch now, with our thanks to him for lending you to us for the past year; but don’t for a moment think that we are giving you up entirely. We still need and depend on you.

Robin you have been a wonderful leader, a great role model and I, and only a few people besides, know the true extent of the work you have put in this year – at all hours, in all seasons.

Thank you for all that you have taught me and I look forward to continuing to work with you in your new role as Past Chair.

Robin’s principal legacy this year, down to the wire, is the appointment of Carlos Fulcher MBA, CAE - whom many of you may have met since he arrived here on Sunday afternoon. We should also recognise at this point the significant work done by Barb Puffer ABC and her committee to land Carlos.

Carlos is leaving tomorrow morning, and all the evidence so far points to him still wanting to be our new Executive Director when he arrives on July 8<sup>th</sup>. I look forward to working closely with him as IABC enters a new era.

Carlos’s arrival will allow us to finally release Ann Lazarus, our interim executive director who arrived “for three months” last July 1<sup>st</sup>.

How time didn’t fly Ann, eh?

Ann, your stoicism and sensibility, experience and expertise have been greatly appreciated by all of us on the International Executive Board this past year and we are truly grateful for your caretaking – and staying the course well beyond the finish time you set.

We're also grateful and appreciative of the very hard work our staff have put in – in this last year especially under difficult circumstances and with some uncertainties.

Our staff work especially hard at this Conference and without not just them, but their dedication, this Conference would have been nowhere near the success professionally it has been, and the commercial considerations not mitigated to anywhere the same degree. So thank you all. Thank you staff. It is truly appreciated (even though I may not hug you as often as you may have been used to previously).

I also want to recognise in my remarks Susan Walker ABC. Susan was the IABC UK Chapter President in 2002 and without her intervention, when she suggested I might want to give a talk about the BBC at “a communications conference in Chicago” I absolutely wouldn't be here today.

I had never heard of IABC then, but I had never been to Chicago either.

So at least one of those seemed a great opportunity.

The first person whose talk I attended was Ned Lundquist's then Jim Lukasewski's. The rest was history, and I've been to every World Conference since. So I think has Jim.....

Finally, I want to recognise the service given to IABC over the last decade by my long suffering wife.

Mrs Grossman would very much like to accompany me on my various sojourns. However, she doesn't like flying, is terrible with jet lag, is not great with foreign cities and doesn't do native food. I said therefore to her that, on balance, it would be cheaper for her to stay at home.

And, right at this moment, she is planning for the weddings of our favourite daughter, Gabriella Susanna Guillette on 14<sup>th</sup> September and of my eldest son and heir, Avichai Gavin Elliott on 26<sup>th</sup> October.

Given these significant life events, this is possibly not the best year for me to have ascended; and I am grateful therefore to Mrs Grossman for extending me to the

Association in the time of her need. No doubt we can send her some flowers for the weddings.

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### ***The road ahead***

So, now that Adrian, Kerby and Robin have dealt with all the tough stuff what is there left to do?

Of course, the answer is quite a lot. Those of you – and there are quite a few - that have been involved with the IABC Strategy work out to 2017 will know that we're proposing two major parts to our Strategy over the next three years.

One, especially in the short term, is to consolidate and build on our Association's financial position and our value proposition for existing members.

The second, from the medium term, is to reach out with new products and to gain new sources of revenue from two much larger constituencies who don't currently constitute our membership : these constituencies being our **member prospect base**, and **businesses** – especially small and medium sized businesses.

The world is changing significantly for Associations, and the global financial crisis has also weighed in, combining with advances in digital and ubiquity of access to knowledge, to reassign the paradigm of value for people seeking to advance their careers.

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### ***Importance of our IABC members***

Now let me say, before I go any further, that IABC's members – our members at large and those in our chapters; our regions and our Fellows – all will always be the heart and soul of our Association.

And there is something very special which makes up that heart and soul.

How many of us have each told a story - of a member unknown to us who has contacted us to say they're an IABC member and needed help of some sort : perhaps a research project, or a new job, or just finding their way about in a strange location.

How many of us have said – “of course we'll help : you're an IABC member too”.

This bond is very special. It is not replicated in many Associations.

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We must never lose that heart and soul and the sense of camaraderie and belongingness which IABC represents so often to its members. It will always be primary to who we are.

We also have to successfully bridge the spectrum however across those – principally older generations - who know and love IABC for what it has been and those – principally younger generations - who do not regard us as a has-been. We must ensure we remain time served, but do not become life expired.

People entering the profession today at twenty something may experience work and life in a vastly different way from those who are retired, but active in the profession at seventy something from how they experienced work and life. While this is of course a generalisation, IABC, to be effective for all our members, needs to try cater for everyone.

This is not about compromise, it is about segmentation. And having the courage and the confidence to regularly try new things while recognising the heritage which brought IABC to where it is today.

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### ***The need for more visible leadership***

And as part of that, those at the head of IABC also need to practise better and more visible leadership.

When he was Chair in 2005-6, Warren Bickford ABC visited 52 chapters during his year. Importantly, he also did so very publicly, blogging about his traversions and showing the importance of connecting with chapter leaders, and listening.

Now I can't promise to visit 52 chapters – that would be one a week, and I should have started this morning; and living in London, it would also clock up an impossible amount of airmiles which you would not appreciate.

But I will do the best I can, and encourage members of the Board to do similarly.

Whether it is a professional issue, a time of seeking comfort or a time of celebration, we want you to feel our presence.

There is much to do, and much to accomplish. I'm a big believer in consensus and team work – as well as making definitive decisions - and I appeal to each one of you here to be part of our wider congregational team.

At the Board level we won't always get it right, but with a positive attitude and constructive participation and a willingness sometimes to forgive, we can achieve much together.

If you would like me to come and visit locally, please do send an invitation. If it's not practical or economic for me to visit personally, one of the leadership team will endeavour to fulfil the slot.

I am determined that the international board should not be perceived as either aloof or clubby – I genuinely believe we are not, but more importantly we should not be perceived as such. And for sure, reconnecting the leadership with the heart and soul of the Association is important to me.

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### ***The forward strategy – new sources of revenue***

But our heart and soul also needs to partner with a forward thinking mind – one which will ensure we maintain the infrastructure which supports those members. And to do that we have to reach out to new and other places.

This is most particularly because the sources of revenue which have sustained the Association for many years, such as World Conference and income from Awards and, especially, publishing can no longer be relied upon.

And so our forward strategy recognises this and this is why it says we need to find new opportunities for revenue.

In the way Cindy Gallop said this morning – we have to redesign our business model because it's the only way we will make money in the future.

My view, and that supported by your International Executive Board, is that we have two untapped sources of - not simply revenue, but also increased reputation and an opportunity to position IABC and the communications profession more squarely in today's society.

The first of these sources is the opportunity for our Association, founded as it is on professional rigour and ethics, to reach out much more strongly to those in the practice of communication who are not yet members of our Association and encourage them more strongly to join us and give them a solid reason for doing that.

The number of people in the world practising communications as a profession is officially unknown but it's certainly many more than belong to our Association.

Now that our domestic house is falling back into order, now is the time to present IABC much more strongly : in our marketing and external communications; to be proud and confident that we are the **only** international association representing communications practitioners; and much more strongly to have our voice, and with it the voice of the profession, presented in places we have failed to do so hitherto.

We need to “be heard” – and incidentally this is just about the last time you will hear that phrase used, but I thought I would give it a swan song; we need to “be heard” – more, represent the practice more and balance the degree to which we learn and increase our knowledge, with the amount we are prepared to speak on behalf of the profession.

This is not just the responsibility of the Chair of the Association. We all have a responsibility – invoking IABC - to speak up when there is something to be said; to share comment when there is a valid opinion to be put, as well as to listen and to learn when others have valid points.

We are a proud member of – and should be one of the largest players in - the Global Alliance for public relations and communication management, whose vision is to enhance the role and value of public relations and communication management to organizations, and to global society.

Throughout the globe, we should be more and better prepared to discuss, teach, learn about and advocate the communications profession. And through this, to become better known, more respected and thus more attractive as the ‘go-to’ place for communication practitioners to belong.

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### ***The value of IABC to businesses***

And then there is our unique pursuit, of being an association of **business** communicators.

Increasingly, following the Global Financial Crisis, communications is a force for competitive difference in business. Get it wrong, or get it right; there's a powerful impact on the bottom line.

**We** know this of course, but as the IABC, we don't leverage it anywhere near enough – and so this is a plug for the B in IABC. It is actually the thing which makes us unique.

There are some **28 million** small and medium enterprises in the United States; some **5 million** in the UK, and over **2 million each** in Canada and Australia.

In addition, over one fifth of IABC's members are practising consultants to business.

So my big question is a simple idea.

Through the power of its advocacy, and by increasing our reputation – in our networks and through our ambassadorial activity, [demipause] can IABC create a market demand for communication services, among especially small and medium sized enterprises, which we lever to our commercial advantage [demipause] by having that market be served by our consultant members with 'preferred status' [demipause] for a brokerage fee, paid by business?

Potentially this would yield:

- Communication advantage for businesses who don't yet realise the value it brings
- Increased reach and market penetration for those of our members who offer agency or consultancy services
- A new source of calendar-balanced revenue for IABC
- Greater reputation and appreciation for IABC and the communications profession.

Will this work? I think it might. And it would appear to require little upfront investment.

Your Board has agreed to commission a research study as a first phase to investigate the market and to know if we can turn this from a hypothesis into a practical proposition.

We expect to issue an RFP shortly for the research. If you would like to comment on this idea, please do so on our memberspeak channel, or on Twitter at IABC1417, and watch this space.

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### ***Concluding remarks***

And so in conclusion, I accept the position of Chair of this august association today with a deep feeling of appreciation and responsibility towards IABC and all it stands for.

Thankfully I do not stand here alone, and the Jewish Ethics of the Fathers teaches us that the one who is wise is the one who learns from every person.

And I consider myself very fortunate to have been part of an excellent International Board for these past three years.

And a board which is truly international, with half the Board living and working outside north America. While this increases our travel costs, there are other places where we can and will offset those costs.

The quality of Board members chosen through the competency based assessment we use by the nominations committee, which comprises representatives from all the Council of Regions plus three members of the executive committee, is also truly remarkable.

But equally remarkable is the number of nominations we do **not** receive each year. As Robin McCasland transitions to becoming past Chair, one of her responsibilities now is to oversee the nominations process and, like me, she is determined to try and increase the number of people who put their hand up each year to come on the Board.

I remember so well, when coming to that first Conference in 2002, seeing 1800 people in the Grand Ballroom at the Chicago Hyatt (which is incidentally the 7th largest non-gaming hotel in the world) and see John Clemons ABC and Annette Martell ABC MC as the transitioning Chairs - never dreaming or even wishing to be following them one day.

But you can, and many of you should. In fact, the best Chair IABC has never had is quite probably in this room.

So if you get approached in a dark corner of the Ian Potter Centre or anywhere else, by a Brit in glasses or an engaging Texan....please, - consider the offer being made and seriously think about it.

Thank you.