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March/April 2026



by Janine Stange, VSAE Annual Conference Keynote Speaker

What if the biggest thing standing between you and momentum isn't time, resources, or opportunity—but a decision?

Every day, professionals find themselves stuck in quiet moments of hesitation: waiting until the timing is right, until the pressure eases, until the circumstances improve. We tell ourselves when things settle down, then I'll take the next step. But what if that way of thinking is exactly what keeps momentum out of reach?

In this energizing keynote, *Choose to Rise: Decisions That Ignite Momentum*, audiences are challenged to rethink the stories they tell themselves about readiness, success, and forward motion. Through powerful storytelling and practical insight, this session explores how the most meaningful progress rarely begins with perfect conditions. It begins with a choice.

Momentum is not something that magically appears once everything is aligned. It is something that is created—often in the middle of uncertainty, pressure, and competing priorities. The individuals and organizations that move forward are rarely the ones with the easiest path. They are the ones willing to rise and take action before they feel completely ready.

This keynote dives into the small but powerful decisions that change trajectories. The kind that

shift teams from stuck to moving, from reactive to intentional, from waiting to leading.

Audiences will explore the hidden ways hesitation shows up in everyday thinking, particularly through the familiar “when-then” mindset—the belief that when something changes, then progress will happen. But progress rarely waits for the perfect moment. It starts when someone decides to move anyway.

Along the way, participants will discover a practical framework for regaining clarity and forward momentum when challenges feel overwhelming. The approach is simple enough to apply immediately, yet powerful enough to reshape how individuals and teams respond to obstacles, setbacks, and uncertainty.

More than motivation, this session delivers perspective. Attendees leave with a renewed sense of ownership over the decisions that shape their momentum—both personally and professionally.

Because the truth is, momentum isn't reserved for extraordinary moments.

It's built through everyday decisions.

And sometimes the most important one is simply this:

To rise.

DON'T MISS IT!



2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE



MAY 3-5

WILLIAMSBURG LODGE

SEE PAGES 5-8
FOR DETAILS!

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEBINAR

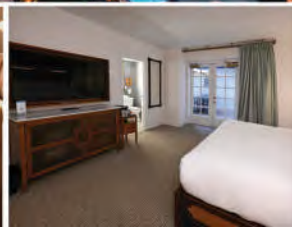
Personal Customer Service
in a Digital Age
April 14
1:30-2:30 pm

NORTHERN VIRGINIA NEW!
ASSOCIATION EXCHANGE
A VSAE Learning and
Leadership Series
April 16
Falls Church, VA

WEBINAR

Legendary Leadership
in Disruptive Times
April 28
1:30-2:30 pm

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Leadership reflections



Abby Tammen
VSAE President

As I close my year serving as President, I do so with immense appreciation and a full heart.

When I stepped into this role, I knew I was serving a community that is truly special. This year has reinforced how deeply rooted our culture of service, excellence, and connection is—and how powerfully it shows up in the way you support one another and advance our profession.

This year moved at lightning speed (with the exception of snowy January, which felt 57 days long), and our momentum continues to build. With a dedicated, forward-thinking Board, engaged volunteers, and the leadership of our new Executive Director, David Walsh, we are charting a path that is both energizing and aligned with who we are.

Our mission—Association professionals: Connecting. Learning. Leading.—is not just a statement. It is something I have witnessed in action all year long. I have

seen deep connections form between peers who quickly become trusted advisors and lifelong colleagues. I have seen members show up eager to learn, to share, and to raise the bar for our profession. I have seen leaders emerge—not because they sought recognition, but because they felt called to serve.

If this year has reinforced one truth, it is this: our strength comes from participation. VSAE is defined not by a board table or a strategic plan, but by you—the volunteer, the mentor, the contributor, the engaged member. Your involvement is the engine that drives our success.

We are strongest when every voice is welcomed and valued. By embracing diverse perspectives and committing to continuous learning, we ensure our community remains resilient, adaptable, and prepared for what lies ahead.

As I reflect on this year, I am filled with excitement for VSAE's future—one grounded in deep connections, excellence, engagement, inclusivity, and resilience.

Thank you for the work you do every day to strengthen your organizations and our profession.

Thank you for trusting me to serve. It has been my honor.

Abby's Leadership Lesson Series

Lesson #6: Stronger Together: Tapping the Power of Our Membership & Teams

The best part of serving this community is remembering that leadership was never meant to be a solo sport. If Lesson #6 has taught me anything throughout my career, it's this: I may not have all the answers, but with this membership, I never actually need to. When you're surrounded by hundreds of smart, generous, wildly capable association pros, the real skill isn't knowing everything, it's knowing how to tap into everyone.

Our collective intelligence is our superpower. One member brings the spark, another brings the strategy, someone else brings the spreadsheet, and suddenly we've built something none of us could have pulled off alone. That's the magic of VSAE: the moment you ask, the room lights up with ideas, experience, and energy.

And the truth is, this isn't just how VSAE works — it's how our own organizations thrive too. The same "stronger together" mindset that fuels this community is exactly what powers our teams back home. When we lean into the strengths around us, we don't just solve problems, we build momentum.



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Saturday, May 2

Schedule subject to change.

6:00–7:00 pm	Executive Director's Reception (invitation only)
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Sunday, May 3

10:00 am–4:00 pm	Pre-conference Activities
5:00–6:00 pm	New Member and First-Time Attendee Mixer (invitation only)
6:00–7:30 pm	Opening Reception (all attendees)
7:30 pm	Dine on Your Own

Monday, May 4

7:00–8:15 am	Breakfast
8:15–8:30 am	Opening Remarks
8:30–9:30 am	OPENING KEYNOTE: CONNECT FOR KEEPS (see article on page 8)
9:45–11:00 am	Breakout Sessions • More Than a Vision Statement: Operationalizing Transformation in Associations • Ethical Decision-Making for Today's Association Leaders • Beyond Membership: Strengthening Culture and Performance in Association Teams
11:15 am–12:45 pm	Luncheon, 2026–2027 Board Installation and CAE Recognitions
1:00–2:15 pm	Breakout Sessions • Mission-Driven Leadership: Uniting Governance and Volunteer Engagement • Befriending the Black Swan: Planning for Effective Crisis Communication • From Transition to Continuity: Strengthening Board–Executive Alignment
2:30–3:30 pm	Breakout Sessions • Navigating Burnout in the Association World • Digging for Truth: Uncovering Drivers of Membership & Retention
3:30–4:30 pm	Shared Interest Group (SIG) Meetings
5:30–6:15 pm	President's Reception (invitation only)
6:30–7:30 pm	Reception
7:30–9:00 pm	Dinner
9:00 pm	Dessert & After Dinner Entertainment

Tuesday, May 5

7:00–8:00 am	Early Riser Optional Activity: Net-Walking in Williamsburg
8:00–9:00 am	Breakfast
8:00–9:00 am	Book Club: <i>Leading Through Free Fall: How Innovators Turn Turbulence into Trust</i> , by Brianna Sylver
9:00–10:15 am	CLOSING KEYNOTE: CHOOSE TO RISE: 5 KEYS TO MAINTAIN BALANCE AND IGNITE MOMENTUM (see article on page 1)
10:30–11:30 am	General Session No Theory, Just Practice: Real AI Tactics Your Association Can Steal Today
11:30–11:45 am	Closing Remarks and 2027 Annual Conference Host Announcement

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KEYNOTE & BREAKOUT SESSIONS

OPENING KEYNOTE Connect for Keeps



Sean Bott
Sean Bott LLC

People don't leave companies—they leave management (and maybe a few bad jokes). When employees feel unseen and unrecognized, engagement suffers. This keynote blends proven techniques from therapeutic and self-compassion research to help your team create meaningful connection and make others feel valued. Add in memorable mind-reading moments and a touch of humor, and it's a session your team will be talking about long after it ends. *Presented courtesy of PK Speakers Bureau.*

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Beyond Membership: Strengthening Culture and Performance in Association Teams



Christopher Jones, Founder
Authentic Business Services

Association leaders must balance member expectations, board relationships, finances, and high-performing teams in a complex environment. Effective leadership goes beyond task management—it requires building a culture of trust, accountability, and engagement. Gain practical frameworks and actionable strategies to strengthen team performance, foster a thriving workplace, and elevate your association's impact.

Ethical Decision-Making for Today's Association Leaders



Holly Davis, CAE
Principal Consultant
Gauge Strategy LLC

Ethical decision-making is vital to association leadership, driving trust, transparency, and long-term impact. This course covers core principles and real-world challenges—from sponsor influence and digital privacy to conflicts of interest and fair resource allocation. Through interactive discussion and practical frameworks, participants gain tools to lead with integrity, strengthen accountability, and build values-driven teams.

More Than a Vision Statement: Operationalizing Transformation in Associations



Kelsey Croston, COO
Richmond Association of REALTORS

The association industry is driven by financial pressures, shifting regulations, diverse member expectations, and technology disruption. This means tomorrow's success hinges on operational excellence today. Many sectors not only need strategic change, but transformation.

This session explores how leaders can apply change management principles alongside core operational disciplines to guide their associations through transformation.

Mission-Driven Leadership: Uniting Governance and Volunteer Engagement



Kelly Ann Gull, CAE, Director,
Professional Development
and Training, National Society
of Professional Engineers



Michelle Runge, CAE
Director of Chapter Relations
The American Inns of Court

"Mission-driven" is a common claim—but how well do governance and volunteer structures actually advance the mission? This session explores how aligning governance with volunteer management drives meaningful engagement and strategic impact. Learn how to empower board and volunteer leaders through clear roles, training, and recognition, and how governance, leadership development, and volunteer frameworks work together. Walk away with practical ideas to strengthen your pipeline, refine orientation, and move from mission-stated to mission-activated.

Befriending the Black Swan: Planning for Effective Crisis Communication

Brian Chandler, APR, Founder & CEO



Commonwealth Public Relations
& Marketing

Crisis communications only become crises when teams aren't prepared—and many are avoidable. This session explores proactive planning and emergency protocols for association leaders, staff, and boards. Learn how to build a crisis communication playbook through "what-if" scenario planning, establish clear approval processes, and craft effective messaging for issues like executive misconduct, board conflict, financial missteps, legislative misalignment, and cybersecurity risks.

From Transition to Continuity: Strengthening Board-Executive Alignment



Alison Teitelbaum, MS, MPH, CAE
Founder & Principal Consultant
AST Strategies

Leadership transitions are inevitable—but disruption doesn't have to be. This session explores how associations can move from reactive transitions to proactive continuity by addressing misaligned expectations, unclear roles, and competing visions. Drawing on real-world case studies and two decades of experience, Alison Teitelbaum will share practical strategies to strengthen board-executive partnerships, foster stability, and reduce disruption. Participants will leave with a clear roadmap for maintaining alignment, clarity, and momentum through change.



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Navigating Burnout in the Association World



Maureen Dingus, CAE, COO
VA Society of CPAs

In the mission-driven, high-expectation world of associations, burnout has quietly become a common and costly reality. Juggling member needs, tight budgets, constant change and increasingly blurred work-life boundaries can wear down even the most passionate professionals. This session will explore the realities of burnout and offer practical strategies for prevention and intervention. We'll also examine professions with the highest levels of burnout and highlight how their associations are stepping up, providing training, resources, and support systems. Together, we'll unpack how early recognition and proactive culture shifts can lead to healthier individuals and stronger organizations.

Digging for Truth: Uncovering the Drivers of Membership & Retention

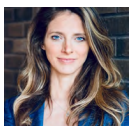


Pete Zimek, CAE, CEO
Novi AMS

Discover what truly drives membership: why people join—and why they stay. This session combines peer insights, research-based perspectives, and practical tools to help you conduct meaningful studies within your own association. Explore proven methodologies alongside cost-effective strategies to better understand member motivations. Walk away with the insights you need to make data-driven decisions that strengthen recruitment and retention.

CLOSING KEYNOTE

Choose to Rise: 5 Keys to Maintain Balance and Ignite Momentum



Janine Stange
Janine Stange LLC

For many association executives, leadership can feel like a never-ending game of whack-a-mole—membership pressures, staffing challenges, budget constraints, board transitions, and industry uncertainty all demanding attention at once. It's no wonder leaders can feel stuck or overwhelmed.

Choose to Rise invites leaders to pause, reset, and regain momentum by focusing on what's within their control—doing what you can, with what you have, where you are.

This keynote introduces the D.R.O.P.P. Method, a practical framework for navigating constant change with clarity and purpose: Decompress, Reconcile, Observe, Plan, Prepare, and Promise. Participants will also explore common Procrastination Profiles, uncovering how

PRE-CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

Sunday, May 3



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fear, self-doubt, and distraction quietly derail progress—and how to move forward anyway.

Grounded in the realities of association leadership, this session reminds AEs that while their industries may differ, their challenges are shared. Attendees will leave with fresh perspective, practical tools, and the confidence to lead with balance, creativity, and renewed momentum—right where they are. *Presented courtesy of PK Speakers Bureau.*

GENERAL SESSION

No Theory, Just Practice: Real AI Tactics Your Association Can Steal Today



Brian Chandler, APR
Founder & CEO
Commonwealth Public
Relations & Marketing

This presentation explores how artificial intelligence is revolutionizing association operations,

marketing, and member engagement. According to a recent survey, 75% of associations already use AI in marketing and communications, yet only 13% have formal AI policies in place. Many remain in early adoption stages, facing barriers like limited skills, time, and concerns over data privacy. Meanwhile, members (especially younger ones) are increasingly AI-savvy: 65% of Gen Z association members report using AI weekly, compared to just 18% of association staff saying their organizations leverage AI. In this session, attendees will learn how to deploy AI-powered personalization, predictive analytics for retention, automated content creation, and systems to scale engagement. Designed for leaders seeking actionable strategies, the program focuses on responsible adoption, balancing innovation with transparency and trust. Participants will leave ready to pilot AI initiatives aligned to mission goals and measurable ROI.



Sparkling Connection

by Sean Bott, VSAE Annual Conference Keynote Speaker

Come with me to 1984. You are a big-headed 3-year-old with green eyes and unruly blond hair. Your newly single father has decided to move you and your 4 siblings from Salt Lake City, Utah to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, because what else is there to do? After the almost 24 hours of travel, you step your bobble-headed self off of the flight into the boiling hot air. Disoriented, distracted, and drained, you put your tiny hand in your father's and step into the alien landscape around you.

After a few hours walking through the oppressive heat, overwhelmed by the strong perfumes and spices, loudspeakers sending words you don't understand bouncing off flat-roofed buildings, you and your father step into a baqala (Saudi version of 7-11).

You look around at the foreign offerings: spicy chips, Vimto drinks, and food items, none of it appealing, none of it like home. And then you see something that adds familiarity to the chaos. A small toy race car. When you push it along the ground, it shoots sparks out of its wheels. Just when you'd started to question the existence of the divine, behold this tiny miracle from white, English speaking, USA heaven. Overjoyed at this discovery, you turn to show your father, but instead you meet only the eyes of a woman dressed head to toe in black except her dark eyes. So, you do what any free range kid of the 80's does, you start to go up and down the aisles, expecting to see his mustached face any moment. When he's

nowhere to be found, you grip the sparking racer, and rush out of the store, tears streaming freely down your hot white face. Eight thousand miles from home suddenly becoming very real, you race down the block among unfamiliar smells, heat, half-covered faces, and loudspeakers, looking for your father. Just when your tears were threatening to become shrieks of terrified panic, a light descends. There he is almost 3 blocks away, distractedly rubbing at his stubble, looking into the distance, having completely forgotten his youngest of 5 back at the Saudi 7-11.

This feeling of disconnection, fear, and uncertainty is my first crystalized memory. And it's something many of us understand today. We feel alone, forgotten, and without a place to belong. As a child, I had little control over this experience. As an adult, these feelings still impact me as they do many of us. But now, there are ways we don't have to feel quite so alone, forgotten, or out of place.

As a mentalist, I specialize in creating powerful connection quickly, and in creating engagement and belonging that become the stuff of people's personal legends. And on May 4th, 2026, I'll be bringing the entertainment, tools, and insights I've experienced in my journey from helping associations move from disconnection to belonging. The tools are simple, research supported, real world tested. They will help create stronger engagement, longer retention, and help continue to build the kind of associations others proselytize about.

In the words of Mother Theresa, "If we cannot find peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."

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VSAE Meeting Planner Summit: Planned by Planners, Powered by Connection

VSAE members gathered in Lynchburg for the 2026 Meeting Planner Summit, bringing together 50 meeting planners and industry partners for two days of practical learning, open conversation, and meaningful connection.

The Virginian Hotel and the City of Lynchburg provided standout hospitality, innovative food and beverages, and a memorable visit to the Anne Spencer Garden House and Museum. The program delivered a strong mix of timely, relevant content. Sessions explored how AI is reshaping conference planning, current travel and tourism trends across Virginia, and how planners and hotels can better align to create value in today's environment. Interactive elements, including peer roundtables and a downtown scavenger hunt, reinforced what makes this event unique—a conference for meeting planners, planned by meeting planners.

The agenda balanced timely topics with highly practical takeaways, reinforcing the evolving role of meeting planners as strategists, marketers, and experience designers.

AI-Enabled Conference Planning

The opening session explored how AI is actively reshaping the way conferences are planned and executed. Rather than positioning AI as a future concept, the focus was on real-world application—how tools can streamline content development, support speaker coordination, and improve

marketing agility. A key takeaway was the importance of pairing technology with structured workflows, allowing planners to work more efficiently without losing the human touch that defines strong events.

Travel Trends & Destination Strategy

Attendees gained insight into current travel behaviors across Virginia and what's driving visitation today. The discussion emphasized how data, branding, and storytelling come together to influence decision-making, and how planners can better align with destination partners to create stronger attendance and more compelling event experiences. Understanding these broader trends helps planners position their events more strategically within a competitive landscape.

Social Media for Events

This session focused on practical ways to use social media as both a marketing and engagement tool. Beyond promotion, the conversation highlighted how platforms can extend the life of an event, build community before and after, and provide low-cost visibility. Attendees walked away with actionable ideas for maximizing reach while staying authentic to their organization's voice.

Planner & Hotel Collaboration

A candid panel discussion examined how the relationship between planners and hospitality partners is evolving. With changing pricing

models, staffing realities, and attendee expectations, both sides emphasized the need for transparency, flexibility, and shared goals. The conversation reinforced that successful events increasingly depend on true partnership, not just transactions.

Interactive Learning & Peer Exchange

The Summit's interactive elements—including a downtown scavenger hunt and peer roundtables—were a consistent highlight. These sessions created space for attendees to share real challenges and solutions, covering topics like budgeting, attendee engagement, AI integration, and risk management. The format reinforced one of the Summit's core strengths: learning directly from peers facing the same realities. The Scavenger Hunt allowed attendees to have fun, explore Lynchburg, and let their competitive juices flow, as teams competed to complete the hunt first and win the inaugural scavenger trophy, a Virginia-shaped cutting board with Virginian Hotel and Lynchburg stickers. The winning team will keep the trophy and have a chance to defend its title next year.

Thank you to our MPS Planning Committee—Amy Gilbody and Suzanne Welsh-Agnew—and Committee Chair Tiffany Brown for curating a thoughtful, relevant, and highly engaging program. Huge thanks to The Virginian Hotel and the City of Lynchburg for providing an exceptional experience throughout.

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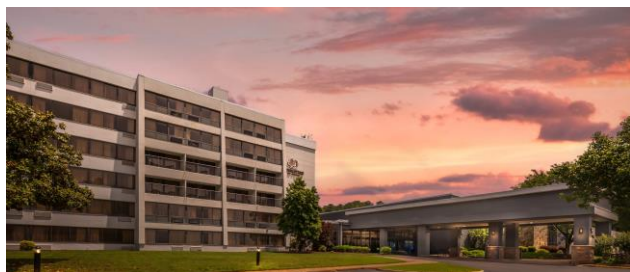
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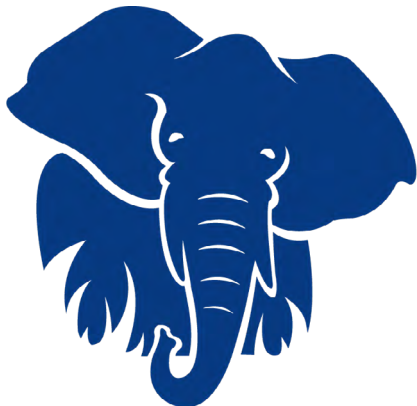


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Nicole Colantonio | *Air-Conditioning, Heating, Refrigeration Institution* | *Arlington*
Vanessa Garbarino | *Virginia Library Association* | *Port Jefferson, NY*
Marta Okoniewski | *American Association of Colleges of Nursing* | *Alexandria*
Kristin Pettway | *DRIVE SMART Virginia* | *Richmond*
Diamond Stephens | *The National Association for Regulatory Administration* | *Fredericksburg*
Jennifer Walsh | *American School Counselor Association* | *Alexandria*

NEW INDUSTRY PARTNERS

Jeff Holland | *Hilton Norfolk The Main* | *Norfolk*
Elise Hrabec | *Visit Richmond VA* | *Richmond*
Emma Mumaw | *Visit Loudoun* | *Leesburg*
Bryan Schmidt | *Bassline Production Group* | *Newport News*
Trey Schunder, III | *The Founders Inn and Spa, Tapestry Collection by Hilton* | *Virginia Beach*
Sharon Wells | *Engagifi* | *Atlanta, GA*

JAMES RIVER AUDIO VISUAL SERVICES ANNOUNCES NEW OWNERSHIP

James River Audio Visual Services (JRAVS) is entering an exciting new chapter with a transition in ownership. After many years of dedicated leadership, John Triska and Randy Cummins are retiring. We extend our sincere gratitude for their commitment and the strong foundation they've built.

JRAVS is now under the ownership of Bruce Vann, a Williamsburg, Virginia-based business owner with a diverse portfolio of successful ventures. Bruce was drawn to JRAVS because of its reputation for delivering exceptional event outcomes and outstanding customer service—values that will continue to guide the company moving forward.

Supporting this transition, David Burton has been appointed Vice President and General Manager. With more than 40 years of experience in the audio-visual industry, David brings seasoned leadership and a strong, relationship-driven approach focused on meeting client needs.

While leadership is evolving, one thing remains the same: JRAVS's commitment to quality and service. The trusted team you've worked with in the past remains in place, ensuring continuity and consistency in every event.

In the months ahead, clients can expect thoughtful enhancements and the introduction of new services—all built on the same customer-first philosophy that defines JRAVS.

We appreciate your continued support and look forward to serving you in this next chapter. If you have any questions or would like to connect, please contact David Burton at davidb@jravs.com or 919-740-5662.

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