NAR, take the high road in Washington, D.C.

This week when the National Association of Realtors board of directors gathers in Washington, D.C., for its annual midyear conference, the NAR leadership has an historic opportunity to bridge the gap within a divided organization. (Among other things, the board will consider a controversial $30 dues hike.)

First, NAR President Elizabeth Mendenhall and CEO Bob Goldberg should consider fessing up to the divide and "Own it." Despite your best efforts, not everyone thinks NAR is doing things right. Not everybody is as informed as the leaders. And despite your movement toward transparency, distrust lingers.

Embrace the folks who are your fiercest critics, recognize them in the hallways, pull them into insider meetings, invite them to executive gatherings and bring them onto the stage. Thank them for their courage and their outrage and listen to their concerns. Who cares if it is awkward or unorthodox. These are the times we live in. People are anxious and want to be heard.

Don't circle the wagons and dismiss these critics. Let them speak up, no matter what their opinions or point of view. Walk in the outsiders' shoes and consider their fight is your fight, upending the good ol' boys. This is the best path for the change you want so bad.

Consider that your volunteer system of showing up for local association meetings as the only way to earn a voice at the table is outdated and should be disrupted.

Be the disrupters and memorialize the new way a wide swath of your membership participates today. They respond to online surveys, they rant on Facebook pages, they tweet and retweet, they like, rank and rate, and they comment on blog and news platforms. This participatory system, though messy, is as legitimate as the arcane volunteer program. Get creative and make both systems work together.

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Your strength will come from your critics if you respect and listen to them, recognize them and support them. Your loyal tribe will support you no matter what so spend less of your valuable time on their issues and needs. Focus instead on listening to those who disagree with you, internalize their criticisms, and let it shape where you are headed this week and in the year ahead. Turn the critics' agenda into your agenda. Consider they may have a bigger following than you acknowledge.

You can still get your dues hike through, but with dignity and with a more united organization, setting you up for greater accomplishments later on.

Your best chance for transformation is welcoming the change agents, those who sit outside the NAR Star Chamber and who want and deserve to be heard.

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