“I skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it is.”
— WAYNE GRETZKY

This simple wisdom captures ACC’s need for vision, strategy and execution as we anticipate marketplace and industry changes that could be ahead.

Nicknamed “The Great One,” Gretzky is generally regarded as the best player in the history of the NHL and has been called “the greatest hockey player ever” by many sportswriters. Wayne honed his skills on a backyard rink that his father built. Ironically, Gretzky’s basic athletic abilities were not considered impressive. He was 6 ft. tall, weighing only 160 pounds as an 18-year-old NHL rookie in 1979, and 185 pounds at the end of his career in 1999. At the beginning, many critics opined that Gretzky was too small, too wiry, and too slow to be a force in the NHL. Despite his unimpressive stature, strength, and speed, however, Gretzky’s intelligence and reading of the game were unrivaled. He was adept at dodging checks from opposing players, and he could consistently anticipate where the puck was going to be and execute the right move at the right time. It was no surprise that Canada would choose him to be the most celebrated torch lighter for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics.

I believe there are several lessons in the Gretzky story as we work to make ACC sustainable for the future. The first is the need for vision. Although Wayne started on a backyard rink and ACC started as a small cohort group, both developed a vision that dwarfed their humble beginnings. ACC was originally formed by a handful of airport consultants seeking professional credibility and collaboration to advocate for a dependable funding stream for airports. Although both original goals are still part of the benefits of ACC membership, our vision has now evolved to new clarity...to deliver excellence in airport development. And while most of our members have built their organizations by providing excellent consulting services, our stated vision has changed its focus from an internal one to an external one; from who we are to how we can make our world better by what we do. Just as Wayne’s focus changed and expanded from the backyard to the NHL, ACC’s focus may be more sustainable as we continue to evolve our focus from credibility to contribution.

Second, I believe that strategy played a key part in Gretzky’s game. Strategy must be designed with the end in mind, intent to accomplish the vision. It must be flexible and responsive to changing conditions and meet the ultimate test...effectiveness. ACC has five strategies to realize its vision, which are:

• Be the “go-to” organization on airport development;
• Provide networking opportunities for our members;
• Advance international engagement and collaboration;
• Facilitate innovative and valuable educational offerings, and;
• Maximize the value of ACC membership and benefits.

Strategy involves using our knowledge of the airport industry to evolve ACC into an organization that is as relevant tomorrow as it is today, or even more so. Strategy is not about “skating” faster while chasing the “puck” in the midst of an economic period that has been labeled the Great Recession. As Wayne demonstrated, it’s not about being the biggest, strongest or even having the most resources to flout in the industry. Strategy is about being present to current trends and marketplace forces that are beyond our control. Further, strategy is about being both intelligent and intentional as we develop a game plan for both our respective firms and ACC on the fly. I believe the collective intelligence and ingenuity of the membership can deal effectively with whatever marketplace changes occur.

Once strategies are selected, it’s the energy of execution that powers progress toward the vision. In ACC, committees are the lifeblood of collaboration and progress. More than twenty committees, led by committed chairs and vice chairs, and powered by committees as large as 60 members, move ACC towards our goal of being the “go-to” organization of airport development. Committees are the medium of collaboration and the vehicle to leverage diverse and valuable airport development skills for the benefit of our industry. This year each committee has been challenged to focus on the vital few initiatives that can be accomplished in order to make “measureable progress in reasonable time.” In these turbulent economic times, I recognize what a challenge it can be to make time for ACC committee leadership or participation even for a limited number of goals. However, all of us involved in ACC truly appreciate the commitment of dozens of members whose efforts take us closer to realizing our organizational vision.

Vision, strategy and execution... a trio that is as effective in winning hockey games as it is in building a sustainable future for an organization. Thank you for the privilege and honor to serve as your ACC Board Chair this year.