

The Path Forward

For New & Growing Non-Profit Organizations



July 2009

Twitter

Since the last edition of The Path Forward I have been twittering for three client organizations. Each is very different so the followers I am collecting for each group are unique. For one, I “follow” prolife men. For another, I follow affluent women who like to pray, and for the third, I follow museums, historical preservationists, and people who like French things. On average, just under half of the people I “follow” choose to “follow back” the organization. They are called “Followers.” Spending an average of 5-15 minutes each day per organization, I have developed an average of 1000 followers for each in fewer than three months. These Twitter Followers are people who choose to receive the micro-blog updates from the organization. They agree to exchange direct messages and contact information with the organization. In short, Twitter is a contemporary way for nonprofit organizations to make new friends. My next experiments will consider how to move Twitter Followers to mailing list recipients and new donors.

Changes to TeamLesley.com

First the web host I had used for six years sold itself to a new owner. Then the new owner refused to support the software I had as a subscription from the previous host. So I had to quickly rewrite the entire website in order to be able to up-date it at all. What was available through the new host was more expensive and less versatile. Then my entire collection of saved emails along with their folders disappeared. Whenever I called customer service or emailed support services, the response was circular and unhelpful. Guess what I finally did? Yup. I changed hosts. Now I am with Go Daddy. I had to rewrite the entire website AGAIN but I think it is better. Would you please take a look at it and let me know whether you agree.

I will be speaking

The Gateway Women of Prayer Conference will be held in Lexington, Kentucky, August 28-30. Called “*Capturing His Heart ~ The Strategic Power of Intimacy with God*”, I will be presenting the same content I taught to a group of 45 pastors in Haiti the last week of April. If you want to learn to pray for your community, please come. Register at www.gatewaycwm.org.

Plan to Make Your Passionate Purpose Possible

The Nonprofit world is filled with wonderful individuals whose compassion motivates them to risk their careers to accomplish miracles and they often do just that. However, to build a track record of success that resonates with the philanthropists, whose role is to fund the miraculous, takes strategic planning. The Rainer Arnhold Fellows Program funds individuals to make change happen for poor children in the developing world. On their website, www.rainerfellows.org, they post a series of questions and tips about the strategic design process that is the most likely, in their opinion, to produce change that will ultimately be possible on a large-scale. The questions are helpful for any strategic design process whether it is for a program, fund-raising campaign, or for a long-term organizational plan for growth. Paraphrasing them, I will add my thoughts:

1. Identify exactly what change you are looking for. This is the real mission. Can you state it in fewer than eight words which include the target population, a verb, and a measurable result? Use objective data like statistics and verifiable test scores to set goals and to make decisions about the program design. Start by listing what already works and eliminating approaches that have proven not to work.
2. Identify any advocates for the change you intend. These people will be able to provide you both support and energy as you work towards the stated results. If you cannot find people who agree that the change is needed, either you must re-evaluate your presuppositions or develop a way to educate the public about the importance of your cause. In effect, if you cannot find a group of advocates for your cause, that becomes the first change you should be looking for.
3. Identify whose behavior must change before you will be able to document the results you want.
4. Identify the incentives which will motivate and sustain the changes in behavior that are key to your intended results. The question “What’s in it for them?” will be essential at every stage of your planning process because the driver for behavior is always rooted in some aspect of self-interest. Try to design a plan that passes the responsibility for the behavior to the people who will benefit from changing theirs. Make sure to frame everything as a win-win proposition.
5. Figure out how to calculate the impact using real numbers. First you need to measure a baseline against which you can compare the change after doing your program. Not only does the criteria have to be logical and practical, it should also make sense from a technical perspective.
6. Calculate how much it will cost to achieve the impact by dividing the total budget by the total impact. This implies making a realistic program budget and a strategic funding plan to generate the budget before the program can begin.

This is the kind of process I push nonprofit organizations through to organize a program for which they can win a grant or to enlarge the capacity of the organization itself. The questions make for important dialogue at board meetings or planning retreats. When the Mulago Foundation (which runs the Rainer Arnhold Fellows Program) evaluates a request for funding they think about impact. The foundation believes that something less tangible is also important: “In the end though, the key to figuring out real impact is an honest, curious, and constructive skepticism. A healthy dose of skepticism—not cynicism – is a gift to doers, funders, and the social sector as a whole” (Tactical Philanthropy, July 10, 2009). This process of planning for measurable positive social change can be restated in eight short sentences. Start with a significant goal. Create a detailed plan. Obtain enough resources to achieve the goal using the plan. Engage the right people. Over deliver. Build a good reliable reputation for excellence. Offer real solutions. Be consistent and persistent.

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She Writes!

Email: teamlesley@sbcglobal.net
Phone: 314-422-5572
#165, 11469 Olive Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63141
www.teamlesley.com



“Most foundations burned by Bernard Madoff had boards that were too small and probably too homogenous” Todd Cohen, Inside Philanthropy Blog, July 6,

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