

Development Companion

VOLUME NINETEEN~NUMBER ONE

FIRST QUARTER 2017

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CEO'S & DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS FROM DEWITT & ASSOCIATES

Development Professionals Must “Keep the Faith and Promote the Faith” *By Louis M. Markwith, Vice President*

May You Live in Interesting Times

There is an old Chinese saying: “May you live in interesting times.” It is said, by some, that this is a curse rather than a positive comment on your future. Every generation lives in interesting times relative to their home, their nation and the international situation.

Right now may seem to be one of those times. Depending on your perspective, it can be good or bad. For those of us who work for and with nonprofit organizations, we feel more concern than most because we are constantly watching the bottom line and wondering how “life surrounding us” will affect our ability to continue to raise friends and funds to support our mission and programs. Each organization should attempt to overcome the some of the turbulence perceived in the environment focusing on what is known, and what is considered essential in the mission and service. These should be points of emphasis for the nonprofit in a time of uncertainty.

What is the Answer?

It is simple to say and difficult to execute at the same time. Simple in that each organization must follow its **mission**. At DeWitt and Associates as we consult with our clients, we emphasize the importance of Board of Directors reviewing the organization’s mission statement formally, at least annually. This review aids the organization in insuring the focus of the nonprofit remains relevant in the society and environment in which it operates. In most cases, the mission will remain the same. However, there can be environmental factors that

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cause an organization to change its mission emphasis because the needs of its constituents may change over time.

There are both positive and negative stories about organizations that have prospered or failed because of their flexibility or inflexibility in a changing environment. We were asked to make a proposal for consulting support to an organization in 2007. The nonprofit had been in business and serving the Richmond, Virginia, area for 140 years. It had made major adjustments over the years in aiding unwed mothers, providing as a safety net, and assisting with housing and family transitions or adoptions over time. It was struggling with the latest environmental challenges caused by Federal and state regulations. Because it could not change, it ceased to exist.

In 2013, a major homeless feeding program which received significant volunteer and food support from many churches and other organizations announced it was closing. The Board said that funding changes had forced the closure. The underlying reason was due to the Board's lack of attention to environmental changes and its failure to inform its supporting constituencies there was a need for assistance

A major national success story occurred in the late 1990's. The United Way did not change its full mission. However, it made a major change in its operating methods which reflected its change in emphasis

The individual chapters realized that they had to stop "doing business as usual" in that the programs being financed year in and year out were not necessarily those that reflected the greatest needs of their communities. In depth studies were conducted to develop a list to the real social and economic needs in each geographic area. The result was that many traditional recipients were eased off of the approved list for support and new organizations that were added that were serving the identified needs with in the area. The United Way continues to seek those organizations that are meeting changing needs.

Development Officers Work on Internal Emphasis....

You already know and we tell our clients that a successful development program is grown from the inside out. The same is true for the message your organization projects. **Everyone the Board member, CEO and staff**, insiders of the organization, should be able to recite the mission and explain the mission to any constituent. If you have read our materials before, you may have seen: **NOIABTIBWITB**. It means No Organization Is Any Better Than Its Board Wants It to Be. This philosophy of mission begins with the Board of Directors; what they demonstrate will permeate the organization. We suggest that the Board of Directors have a mission moment

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- ◆ Building and operating effective programs to raise friends and funds
- ◆ Capital campaign planning and counsel
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- ◆ Marketing and communications programs
- ◆ Strategic planning that builds prospect ownership
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- ◆ Foundation grant-seeking expertise
- ◆ Establishing/improving major gifts programs
- ◆ Setting up and implementing planned giving programs
- ◆ Event planning and management
- ◆ Development program studies and audits
- ◆ Board workshops and retreats
- ◆ Executive search
- ◆ Staff and volunteer training

at every meeting where the mission statement is read aloud at the opening of the meeting. This is a centering technique to remind everyone why they are attending the meeting and that discussion and challenges to be considered are all related to the mission.

Development Officers can influence message emphasis at every level within the organization. Begin with your own attitude and your actions. In your communication with donors insure that you are reinforcing familiar positive themes about your organization's mission, plans and programs. We all know that repetition is the factor in gaining message strength and awareness. Too often, we opt for changing the message content because we think it is stale. How many times have you seen "you can save 15% on GIECO Insurance?" Repetition. We need to stay on message for longer and consistently.

Whether you are an Annual Fund Officer, Major Gifts Officer or Chief Development Officer, you have the responsibility of using all your media techniques to support those ideas and programs to which your donors have responded. Your donors are creatures of habit. It is one of the reasons it is difficult to upgrade donors. Once committed, they tend to do the same thing. Unless there is major crisis within your institution to upset your image, consistent messaging during times of social or economic, uncertainty will keep your donors loyal.

When attending staff meetings and other functions use your influence to focus on the positive aspects of your organization and reinforce ideas about messaging with your colleagues and your primary volunteers. Encourage discussion about "good things" you collectively are doing. Positive attitudes will build morale. Remember, we are all bombarded by the same external pressures. We, too, can succumb. Good morale will be reflected in your communication and will impact your donors.

Double your efforts to be "in touch" with your individual donors. Quick notes to your prospects that is just a "hello" will keep your organization in their mind. Thank your donors **again** for their past support without asking again. Gather a group of organization's leaders and larger donors to conduct a "Thank-a-Thon. Calling friends to check in and thank build goodwill among your donors. The unexpected gesture will impress your donors.

It is critical that you "remain on message." When you are working directly with your volunteers or donors, do not get drawn into discussions about politics, social issues other than those your organization is confronting, or climate change. Most will only be interested in your opinion if it coincides with theirs.

Before every meeting or encounter, select three major points about positive work your nonprofit is doing. Always steer the conversation back to those points.

With everyone in your organization clearly focused on the mission, a new expectation is created in every activity of the nonprofit. The communications from every facet of the organization will reflect the driving force that pushes the programs and services forward. In this time of concern, your constituents will respond to the fact that your nonprofit is stable and pursuing well-known and trusted objectives.



Now, About Our Mission

We are always interested in professionals in the field learning about DeWitt and Associates.

Our Mission

To deepen the body of knowledge and strengthen the capacity of nonprofit leaders and professionals

Our Singular Goal

To ensure that our client partner becomes stronger and better able to serve its mission, its goals, and its clients

We believe we have a unique approach to consulting and building the profession we have chosen. I recommend that you check our new website at www.dewittandassociates.com. It is fresh and new and you may learn more about how we can assist your organization.



The 2017 Millwood Institute is in the early planning stages. Once again, it will be held at the beautiful Carter Hall Conference Center in Millwood, VA.

Put October 1-3, 2017 on your calendar and consider enrolling your CEO and Board chair for a one-of-a-kind educational experience. Check the website for details that will be posted soon.

<http://millwoodinstitute.org>.

The Development Companion® *is published quarterly by*

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DeWitt & Associates, Inc. is a full service nonprofit management consulting firm. Serving clients for 21 years, the DeWitt Consultants have more than 180 years of experience to provide counsel to clients in: Fundraising; Marketing/Communications; Interim Executive Management; Executive Search, Selection, and Coaching; Support and Training for Boards of Directors and Organizational Staff Members; Strategic Planning; Organizational/Operational Assessment; Executive Succession Planning; Crisis Management.

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