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**Strategic Planning for  
Voluntary Non-Profits**  
**A personal Story:**  
**Raising Money For a  
Trip to the Soviet Union**  
**Twenty Words That Sell**

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# Strategic Planning for Voluntary Nonprofits

*by Marianne Gorczyra*

## I. Introduction— Climate for Voluntary Nonprofits

With current trends of reduced federal spending on local development and human services, grassroots organizations are finding a critical need to be more and more creative in the search for resources to sustain themselves and their activities. Once plentiful sources of dollars for deserving special projects have shrunk or dried up in present efforts to balance the federal budget and encourage private sector support of local initiatives. The result of this shift in economic policy has been to force local nonprofits (especially grassroots, voluntary nonprofits) to be more efficient in their projects and more creative in researching and identifying funding sources.

Scarcity of federal and other government dollars has been a decisive factor in reduced funds available for local development and human services. For example, once comfortably funded community development organizations are now faced with re-evaluating policies and projects, keeping the most viable and getting rid of dead wood. Those which don't go through this painful but necessary process, may become unable to compete with newer, leaner organizations which

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have realized the need to streamline and organize for success in a much more competitive climate.

It is increasingly clear that voluntary nonprofits must become more businesslike in managing their organizations. A key element in this businesslike approach is the planning function, an element which the business world deems critical to good management.

This article is devoted to a discussion of specific problems faced by voluntary nonprofits and the relationship of these problems to the nonprofit's traditional avoidance of long range planning and other good management techniques. One possible explanation for this avoidance is that in their infancies, voluntary nonprofits tend to be single-goal oriented. The simplicity of their purpose requires little actual planning time or effort. Group members are already well aware of why they have come together and what they are going to do.

Once a pattern of not engaging in planning is established, however, nonprofit management styles seem disinclined to change, even when organizational growth and increased complexity indicate a change in mission is needed. A group's growth and development may be responsible for changing its overall direction or purpose, but if members don't discuss changes and record them in their own planning documents, the shift in emphasis remains ambiguous and confusing and long range direction and desired outcomes are unclear.

## II. Special Problems of Voluntary Nonprofits

Nonprofits in general confront particular problems of coping in a society which tends to measure success in terms

of relative profits and the status of the bottom line. But voluntary nonprofits face special difficulties in trying to run their organizations efficiently, and in measuring and evaluating the extent of their impact or success.

Most of the examples in this article are of social service or community development oriented organizations. They frequently spring spontaneously from a desire to address a particular critical need of a specific constituency. Many times members have an inherent reluctance to accept the presence or ideas of outsiders, and may consider their organization to be much like a private club. The implications and drawbacks of this attitude are that group members resist new ideas and outside expertise from which they might greatly benefit. Moreover, with such a "closed shop" attitude, the organizations may end up being run by those who know little or nothing about management, even though they may possess a wealth of talent in other areas.

Occasionally voluntary nonprofit organizations are fortunate enough to have one or two paid staff members. But all too often, primary staff and of course board members are not compensated for their time. People serving in these positions are doing so in their spare time, frequently after putting in a full day at their regular jobs. Needless to say, their time, patience and energies often run low. Dedicated as they are, there are still limits to human endurance in coping with the multiple responsibilities of carrying out the organization's special public purpose. In these cases, it is vital to keep the organization streamlined in its purpose and zeroed in on specific objectives. Without this focused effort, precious volunteer time may be spent floundering for direction or working on non-priority activities.

Overloaded staff people may pose another problem for voluntary nonprofits because they can become victims of volunteer burnout. Spillover from this condition can shake the very foundations of an organization. Dissatisfied former volunteers may talk about their experiences outside the organization and make the group's recruiting task far more difficult. Erratic membership patterns can retard a group's progress toward specific goals, especially when assignments must be redirected to new or untrained volunteers.

All these characteristics of voluntary nonprofits reflect their innate tendency to be issue oriented and reactive. Having come together initially over one "bright idea" as their primary planning tool, they continue with the same strategy, i.e. *reacting* to a problem rather than creating a vision of what they can accomplish. By the time the second or third "bright idea" has surfaced, the group may have strayed significantly from its original stated mission or purpose, if indeed, it ever had one.

The "bright idea" approach contributes to serious management problems that revolve around members' confusion in determining the organization's long range purpose. Voluntary nonprofits are frequently held together by the energy and vision of one or more dedicated volunteers. With no clear mission or plan in place, other members may wonder where

## ***Some say planning is too expensive and there is no money in the budget for it.***

the group is headed and be understandably confused about the group's mission and priorities. They may express differing opinions about what they understand the purpose of the group to be. Efforts to achieve goals can become scattered and inefficient causing the organization to derail.

Confusion may produce conflicts among members or between board and staff because no consensus exists about what individuals should be doing. Conflict deepens any existing problems because with it comes an inevitable breakdown, or at least slowdown, in the communication process. Group energies must then be redirected to managing the conflict rather than pursuing organizational goals.

Perhaps the most stressful and organizationally threatening difficulties emerge when voluntary nonprofits face irregularities in their funding base. Unlike for-profit businesses and even many large nonprofits, smaller voluntary nonprofits may not be engaged in activities which generate enough income to sustain their projects. Many are heavily reliant on public and private sector funding to make their projects work.

Loss of funding occurs more and more frequently in today's climate of rapidly disappearing public sector monies. As this happens, groups are faced with the growing challenge of trying to locate and attract alternate sources of funding. At the same time the need to continue their project or provide their public service function to their specialized constituency doesn't end. The result is more work for everyone.

Voluntary nonprofits are traditional seekers of grant monies from government sources, the corporate sector and private foundations. These major funders are sensitive to evidence of financial and management competence. Non-existent or poorly conceived plans present poor testimony of a group's ability to administer and make best use of funds. Instead, they point out already inherent weaknesses in the organizational structure, that is, lack of effective planning and management strategies.

Joan Flanagan, in her book *The Successful Volunteer Organization*, emphasizes that all three basic types of funders (foundation, corporations and individuals) like to know that an organization has a firm notion of its mission and a clear

sense of where it is going. Grantors are not in the habit of giving money to an organization that is still floundering in its effort to determine its overall purpose or goal. There is a significant need for groups to define purposes and priorities, to record them and to dedicate their efforts to pursuing and achieving objectives within a specific time frame.

Measuring outputs is yet another of the challenges voluntary nonprofits face. Profit-making companies have an easier time with this measurement since the bottom line on the financial balance sheet tells the story. But nonprofits traditionally use many different criteria for evaluating program success. In some cases they are able to quantify results (e.g. so many houses rehabilitated or a specific number of food baskets distributed), but all too often the product is too intangible for quantifiable measurement.

Nonprofits need to be sensitive to public opinion reaction to their programs. Here, too, with so many different perspectives, there exists a real difficulty in focusing on an accepted evaluation of final outcomes. Divergent public attitudes may open the organization to various criticisms. Each critic or group of critics brings different values to its evaluation of programs so that groups may feel pulled in different directions trying to answer every complaint. It is worthwhile, however, for the organization to be aware of the possibility that funding may be withdrawn if evaluative criteria of the organization and the funder don't match. Then the money search begins all over again.

Though this list of problems for voluntary nonprofits is by no means exhaustive, it provides a concentrated overview of the tremendous odds against which small (particularly neighborhood-based) voluntary nonprofits must struggle. As in the business world, nonprofits are most likely to fail due to poor management. The larger problem is that resistance to the adoption of good management techniques is so pervasive.

Voluntary nonprofits need to apply basic good business principals to their efforts, but because members are largely not formally educated or trained in these skills they are often unaware of the reasons for their failures. Unfortunately, this means that when they try again or start a new project, they invariably make the same mistakes. Too many failures make it virtually impossible to attract outside funding. In addition, a poor track record is disheartening to members and may sooner or later bring on their defection threatening the existence of the organization.

### **III. Moving Voluntary Nonprofits Toward Planning**

In recent years voluntary nonprofits have had more resources available to them in areas of technical support. Government encouragement of grassroots efforts has resulted in an increasing number of organizations whose primary purpose is to provide technical assistance to voluntary nonprofits.

Technical assistance offered from these organizations traditionally centers around help with bookkeeping and account-

ing procedures, public relations functions such as promoting or advertising events, writing and producing newsletters, assistance with proposal writing and other fundraising efforts, and conflict management advice. Most are also equipped to offer help in the areas of organizational management and planning.

Although each of these areas is important, assistance with organizational management and planning may be the most valuable to voluntary nonprofits. Unfortunately, it is one of the least frequently requested services by voluntary nonprofits, primarily because they fail to see or appreciate its value. They are more inclined to look upon it as a waste of time that could be more profitably spent on specific project work.

Technical assistance providers, in order to be of greatest benefit to their nonprofit clientele, must then begin looking for ways to promote planning and management services and to demonstrate their importance. One way of doing that is to describe several different approaches to strategic planning so that a group might be able to choose a process which suits its particular needs, style, and level of sophistication.

A technical assistance facilitator, who will move through planning sessions with the group, can help them to stay on

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## ***N*onprofits in general confront particular problems of coping in a society which measures success in terms of profits.**

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task, understand planning terms, set reasonable goals and measurable objectives, develop a timetable, and determine a workable evaluation strategy. All too often groups feel more ambitious during a planning session than they do when they are faced with carrying out the objectives. The objective viewpoint of a trained facilitator can spot this tendency and head off the potential problem of overcommitment.

Brian O'Connell makes a strong case for what he calls the planning retreat. The planning process, he believes, is too often described in complicated terms which scare off unsophisticated groups. There is nothing inherently complicated in the process and no reason why terms and procedure cannot be simplified and freed from technical jargon, making it much more appealing to grassroots nonprofit groups.

***Voluntary nonprofits are frequently held together by the energy and vision of one or more dedicated volunteers. Without focused effort, precious volunteer time may be spent floundering for direction or working on non-priority activities.***

In O'Connell's conception of the planning retreat, board members come together in a specially chosen location, different from their normal meeting place. In advance of the retreat, each is asked to think about the most important things to be accomplished during the upcoming year. Once they have assembled they will determine which things turn up frequently enough to be considered important to the majority of members, and which ones are also within the realm of possibility.

O'Connell believes that two major advantages accrue to the group willing to go through the planning retreat process. Besides gaining that clear vision of the group's mission, they will find that this type of involvement in the planning process produces a commitment to organizational goals that may not surface in other planning efforts. In addition, the retreats often result in a camaraderie and enthusiasm which develop from the give and take of the difficult planning and decision-making tasks and the growing mutual commitment to the group's overall mission.

#### **IV. The Process**

Whatever specific process a voluntary nonprofit ultimately chooses for its planning efforts, it should contain the four essential principles found in the traditional business approach to strategic planning. Before the four planning steps are undertaken, an assessment of surrounding conditions must take place. Business planners would never begin without considering the environment outside their organization. They know they must be alert to factors which might affect their current position in the market or their future directions. Likewise, voluntary nonprofits need to look outside their own group at least far enough to determine if there are any trends that present opportunities or threats to the group's mission or potential project plans.

Once these outside factors have been carefully considered, the business or nonprofit begins to look inward. This is the time for determining the organizational mission. The process should produce a statement about the long range vision of what the organization seeks to become. Businesses will be focusing on their distinctive competencies.

So, too, should nonprofits be looking at what they have accomplished, especially at their biggest triumphs. They might look upon this phase as taking inventory.

Some notion about where the group would like to be in five years should be discussed during this planning segment, but groups should not allow themselves to become overwhelmed at the prospect of looking too far ahead. For many organizations which have undergone little or no previous formal planning, making a one year plan may be all they can cope with the first time around. As they become more comfortable with planning procedures and strategies, they will be better able to do long range thinking.

Following the determination of an organizational mission, business planners begin to set organizational objectives. Here

planners are careful that they are expressing desirable outcomes in terms that can be converted into specific actions. This is also the phase in which the difficult task of setting organizational priorities is addressed.

Voluntary nonprofits may prefer to approach this planning phase as one in which they will establish targets. One of the most frequent failures of those not accustomed to planning is that of failing to set measurable targets. The group must have some way of knowing if it has been successful in carrying out its goals and objectives. This is particularly important when reporting and accounting to funders or in describing the group's track record when seeking new project money.

In the third planning phase, business planners concentrate on organizational strategies. Determinations must be made about whether the organization is going to try to further penetrate its present market, or instead develop new ones. In some cases, decisions are made to develop new products to keep up with changing trends and competition.

For voluntary nonprofits, the parallel planning segment can be characterized as developing an action plan. During this phase, group members need to identify what tasks are required to carry out the objectives. Moreover, they need to determine who is responsible for carrying out tasks and who has overall responsibility for program progress. Within the action plan should be a time table for accomplishing tasks so that the program supervisor can monitor progress and make necessary adjustments throughout the year.

In the final phase of the planning process, business planners deal with the organizational portfolio plan. This is an evaluative stage during which tough decisions must be made regarding relative successes of various segments of the business. Some strategic business units may be sold, while others may be revamped and revitalized. Still others are maintained "as is" because of their relative strength in the market.

The evaluation phase for voluntary nonprofits will focus more specifically on achievement of objectives. Here, too, the group will have to decide whether to carry on with specific programs which are not measuring up to expectations or which have become too costly, either in terms of money, time, or effort.

Groups should also take time during this phase to assess their impact on the public. They must be aware of the kind of public image they have and decide whether that image needs changing.

## V. Conclusion

Caught in a significant squeeze for funding dollars, good management becomes more and more important to voluntary nonprofits. If they are willing to devote even a relatively small amount of time in a planning process in order to clarify their direction and objectives, they will generally achieve three important advantages. 1) Planning will improve paid staff, volunteer and client relations. 2) It will provide a means of

assessing how well services are being provided. And, 3) it will help to reduce *reactive* management in the organization.

Planning experts caution nonprofits to be aware that the strategic planning and management processes are dynamic. Because they are ongoing, they must be designed with a great deal of flexibility and capacity for change.

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Still with volunteer time and funding dollars at a premium, with conflicts brewing and tempers flaring, there are lots of reasons groups choose to put off planning. Many organizations are convinced that planning takes too much time and effort and they don't want to further burden their already over-worked volunteer staff.

Some say planning is too expensive and there is no money in the budget for it. Yet others contend that long range plans may trap them into strategies that are not responsive enough to meet the needs of their constituency.

Thomas Wolf, in *The NonProfit Organization*, says none of these arguments is justified. The only justifiable argument against planning, he believes, is poor planning. When that happens, it "saps energies and the spirit of an organization's board, staff and sometimes constituency." No one method is right for all organizations but the planning process is so important, that it is vital for all nonprofits to find a process that works for them. ■

## A Planning Approach for Voluntary Nonprofits

**W**hen nonprofits *do* plan, strategies tend to be based on objectives. These in turn are often based on budgetary consideration, rather than the overall mission.

The key is choosing a process that will reveal a clear cut organizational *mission*. It should be simple and direct enough for people untrained in business management skills to carry out on their own. At the same time, it should also contain all the important elements businesses use in their strategic planning process.

*Sample process for nonprofits*—One of the least painful ways to go about planning is for the group to concentrate on answering a series of questions like those below:

### 1. Inventory

- Where have we been?
- What have we done in the past 12 months?
- What didn't get done? Why?
- What is this organization all about?
- Why do we exist?
- Who do we want to benefit from our existence?
- What are our assets? People, money, in-kinds, influence?
- What do we do best?
- Where are our weaknesses?

### 2. Targets—goals and objectives

- What do we want to see done in the next 12 months? 24 months? 5 years?
- How can we quantify this expectation?
- Which are the most important of these objectives? Least important? (Rank order objectives)
- How will we be able to evaluate our progress?

### 3. Action Plan

- What steps or actions will be required to meet our first objective? the second?
- What is the time table for accomplishing the tasks?
- Who will be assigned to carry out various tasks?
- Who has overall responsibility for seeing that tasks are accomplished?

### 4. Evaluation

- Did we achieve our targets?
- Why or why not?
- How can we do better next time?
- Which programs or projects did not work out?
- Can we fix them?
- Are they worth fixing?
- Should we add new programs? Which ones?
- How do people outside our organization see us?
- Does the public perceive us as making a contribution to the community?
- What do they understand to be our mission?

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# A Personal Story: Raising Money for a Trip to the Soviet Union

by Paul VanDeCarr

**W**hen I first decided to go to the Soviet Union, I relished the thought of exploring and learning more about our super-power "enemy" up-close, but I found myself first needing to engage in an immediate and intensive fundraising effort to cover the cost of the trip. At \$1100 a head, the trip is expensive for most any high school student, and five of us (four students and one teacher from Brookline (Mass.) High School had three weeks to raise \$3500. If we didn't reach our goal, one or more of us couldn't go.

With limited resources—certainly not enough time to apply and not enough need to be considered for a foundation or corporate grant—this task was more difficult for us than it initially appeared. But by carefully considering a fundraising plan, we set about completing it.

First, we decided on a goal. How much would we need, and for what? We were liberal in estimating how much each of us could put towards our own trip, and conservative in determining how much we could get from other individual sources. Overly optimistic projections have a way of making fundraisers cocky and careless, so this caution mind-set helped us.

Determining how much money we would need was easy: the \$5500 total cost less the \$2000 we could jointly contribute

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*Paul VanDeCarr is a 1986 graduate of Brookline (Mass.) High School, where he presided over the school's peace group. He is currently the student co-director of the Student/Teacher Organization to Prevent (STOP) Nuclear War, a national anti-nuclear organization for high school students.*

of our own money. Locating and pursuing funding sources was more difficult. The obvious first question was, "Who will give us money?" To answer that question we asked ourselves, "Why *should* someone give us money, or why would they want to?" Answering this question gave us these possibilities to target for a fundraising pitch: neighbors and relatives, school teachers and administrators, students, local businesses, and churches. We decided that people in each of these categories would find good cause in supporting us: School teachers and administrators because the educational aspect of the trip would appeal to them; neighbors and relatives because they know us and would support at least *us*, if not the trip and the peace cause behind it; students, because of the natural affinity among peers; local businesses, because of good press (discussed later); and churches because of the question of human rights and religious freedom in the USSR.

Neighbors and relatives proved to be the most lucrative source of funds. Door-to-door canvassing is a high-pressure yet forthright way of asking people for money. Before undertaking this effort, we each thought of a pitch we could deliver. Some especially successful elements of my personal pitch included the following:

- identifying myself as a neighbor (if I didn't know them) to instantly establish our relationship and help ease the feeling of having a complete stranger on the doorstep;
- telling them I had a deadline to discourage an "I'll think about it" response; and
- asking for a specific amount of money (\$20) to set a standard.

In collecting pledges for Boston's annual Walk for Hunger and the annual Walk for Peace, I've observed that people will generally pledge the amount they see other people are pledging when they read my sheet. Taking this into account, I set an initial standard of \$20 per household, thus helping create the momentum that would sustain the cash flow.

People, though, rarely (if ever) just *give away* money. They're usually asking, "What's in it for me?" Knowing that, we decided to give our sponsors something for their \$20. We figured that the best thing we could do was tell them what we learned. Therefore, we told our donors that in exchange for their contribution, we would invite them to a slide show and discussion about our trip when we returned.

Finally, we counted on the fact that a person often finds it hard to shut the door in the face of a neighbor. Thus, the sheer pressure of the situation (and pressure is not necessarily a bad thing) increased the numbers of donors. Even my politically conservative uncle sent me a generous donation by virtue of our relationship, which goes to show that a donor doesn't have to support the cause, just something about the receiver.

Canvassing all the town's teachers and administrators would have been difficult, if not impossible, so we simply sent messages to all of them. The significantly lower return rate from teachers clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of canvassing. But taking an approach we thought would appeal to teachers helped (we consulted with a number of teachers beforehand to develop our approach): in exchange for your support of our *educational, fact-finding* trip to the USSR, we will make presentations to your students about our trip upon returning. The fact that we would meet with Soviet students while in the USSR helped our credibility as "fact-finders"; and we thought the teachers would enjoy learning about education on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Going to the USSR for a few weeks didn't make us experts on the country and its people (though we did learn a lot), but it raised many questions for us which in turn helped our discussion-facilitation skills, which we used to our advantage in our classroom talks.

Students, we found, would give money to just about any non-extremist cause—so long as it didn't cost too much! Students, of course, rarely carry around lots of money in school, nor are they willing to sacrifice much of what they do have. But getting small amounts of money from lots of students seemed logical. A raffle was our best idea, so we created a sure-win raffle. We asked for a donation of prizes from local businesses as second through fifth prizes, and offered \$200 cash as first prize. We assumed we would sell more than two hundred tickets at one dollar each. We did. Students, ever in need of a few hundred dollars, snapped up the tickets.

But why would any business want to give us gift certificates for prizes? Again examining the question, "What's in it for me?," had to create incentive. We certainly couldn't give them anything material. What they wanted was more business. The

closest thing to an advertisement we could offer them was good PR! And what better PR than to have locals know that their business is supporting local students in their educational endeavors? All we needed to do was get the local newspaper to mention them, but to do that we needed to have our fundraising story covered. We had to make the story newsworthy. Plenty of school groups raise money! So we decided to ask a newsworthy person—namely Massachusetts Governor Michael J. Dukakis—to pick the winning raffle tickets. We'd have pictures of the ticket-picking (with us in them) taken to give to the local weekly newspapers. The governor has a portion of his morning scheduled for things like this, doing up to twenty photography sessions in one hour. He accepted our offer, so the newspaper agreed to cover it, so we had incentive for the businesses, so we had raffle prizes for potential ticket-buyers!

And finally, some churches gave us money in exchange for talking to them about our trip and our discoveries about religion and religious freedom in the Soviet Union.

One other generous donor that was not in any of our target groups (though very well could have been after more thought) was the local Rotary Club. Although we asked them for money—thinking "Why not?"—we couldn't think of any reason for their giving us money. Except one: that we lived in the same town. By the same token that relatives supported us because we were in the same family, the Rotary Club, we believe, supported us because we were in the same town.

We would have never even thought of asking the Rotary Club had it not been for the advice of our ever-helpful headmaster. It's important to take advantage of resources. Resource people can be anyone: friends, neighbors, relatives, teachers, co-workers, or anyone else. What makes them resource people is their access to ideas, services, people or materials—in this case, a member of the local Rotary Club and an idea. Fully utilizing resources and resource people is not abusing them, it's simply having them help you. Perhaps a more telling title for a resource person is a "contact." It seems not only "okay," but also vital to have a lot to offer; you've just got to ask for it. The same holds true here, and it certainly helped us.

Further analysis of this and other fundraising efforts would reveal one more element of success: specifics. People want to know exactly where their money is going. Asking for money for "helping to make the world a better place" would have produced a failed effort, even though that's what we'd have done with it. Asking for money to go to the Soviet Union on such-and-such a date and to cities x, y, and z produced a success. Similarly, organizations that ask for money for a specific project have a higher return rate than when they ask for general support.

After receiving all the money, we would have been foolish to "take it and run." Our follow-up letters thanking our sponsors and inviting them to the slide show and discussion were extremely important. Besides leaving the sponsors on a good note, the letter provided good ground-work for future funding appeals to the same people. Perhaps if some students from

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our high school want to visit the USSR next year, they could contact our donors from this year who remember their beneficiaries as courteous and intelligent—not to mention true to their word for providing the service they promised.

Perhaps the foremost fundraising lesson in all of this is developing an angle. We would be asking people for money for our trip to the USSR, and all of them would be asking, "What's in it for me?" We thought of people for whom there was something in it and creatively and effectively described what it was. We ended with a successful fundraising campaign, soaring 15% over our projections, and everyone (not to mention the cause of world peace and international understanding) bettered from it. ■

For more information on these trips to the Soviet Union which are geared to high school students and teachers, but open to anyone, contact:

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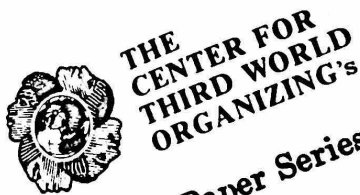
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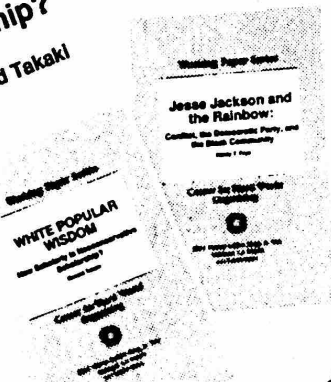
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# Twenty Words That Sell

by Kim Klein

Most fundraisers know, even though they may be reluctant to admit it, that successful fundraising is, in large part, selling. Our donors are our 'customers.' They 'buy' our 'product,' which is our organization and its programs. In some cases, donors actually 'buy' buildings, new wings on existing buildings, or other physical things. Donors deserve the same sense of satisfaction that people get when purchasing a quality item at a good price. Gift solicitors need to be as pleasant, honest and straightforward as good salespeople. Our organizations should not be oversold, and prospects should not be told things that are exaggerated or untrue, no matter how tempting that may be. On the other hand, using simple sales techniques allows us to make the organization sound as appealing to the prospect as it really is. Most social change organizations undersell themselves. They do not present themselves in the most attractive way, and consequently do not attract all the people who would be interested and committed to them.

The purpose of this article is to look briefly at the language of selling by examining the twenty words most frequently used in successful commercials. In some cases the word may be inappropriate, but the concept will be useful. The use of these words will vary from group to group, and strategy to strategy, but they are useful to know as you promote the work of your organization.

These twenty words are not presented in any particular order. They are taken from a large survey of successful ads in print, on radio and TV, and billboards. Each word is followed by a suggestion as to how non-profits might incorporate it.

1) **You, yours:** Everyone loves to hear about themselves. The

use of these words gives the impression that a person is being personally addressed or referred to.

2) **Save:** Most people want to save time, money, steps, work, or something. Non-profits save lives, rights, wilderness, etc. These savings should be tied to the prospects. "How does it benefit me to save this historic monument?" "Why should it be important to me to keep abortion safe and legal, when I will never need an abortion?"

3) **Free:** Non-profits can use this selling word. Offer "free information," a "free T-shirt with a gift of \$35 or more," "free book if you join before August 15."

4) **Sale:** This word can be used in many special events. Garage sales can advertise, "Priced to move—everything on sale." Raffle tickets can be "On sale at your local feminist bookstore." From time to time, try putting your literature on sale to celebrate Christmas, your seventh anniversary, or Labor Day.

5) **New:** People don't want old, hackneyed, could-get-it-anywhere products. Nor do they respond to non-profits who are boring. So, how about a supplement to your newsletter that is "New from Tenants' Rights," or a classified ad, "New information on the effects of aspirin discovered by People For Drug Free Lives, \$1.50 postpaid?"

6) **Bargain:** Here is a word which may be hard to use, but is important as a concept. Your members should think that the price they pay to belong is very little compared to the work you do, or that your budget is very low for the amount of effect your group has.

7) **Guaranteed:** A word we rarely associate with non-profits. However, groups who have used this word to encourage subscriptions, memberships, or selling literature have found that it

increased people's responsiveness. When something is *guaranteed* it gives a person the freedom to invest without worrying whether he/she will regret the purchase. "Guaranteed or money back" is a way of saying that your organization puts its money where its mouth is. In actual fact, almost no one will write for their money back, even if they are dissatisfied with the product.

8) **Inexpensive:** Like "bargain," this word is more useful as a concept, and could be used in the same way. However, don't overlook it for selling Christmas or Hanukkah cards, T-shirts, buttons, etc. Also, always use *inexpensive* rather than "cheap," which connotes shoddy and poorly made.

9) **Extra or Ultra:** These words are used two ways in advertising: one is to get people to buy a product by including an extra knife, razor blade, etc.; the other is to advertise *extra-strength* or *ultra-smooth*. Used carefully and sparingly, these words could promote special events and advertise membership premiums.

10) **Easy:** Groups that sell solar water heaters, educational toys for children, manuals describing how to sue your landlord, or organize your neighborhood, need to make their products seem easy to use, easy to read, or easy to assemble.

11) **Dividends:** Comfort, convenience, health and safety are what people want from their queen-size mattresses or electric can openers. Non-profits work toward these ends and many others in much deeper ways. Dividends "pay off." A "small investment" may have a "high yield." Using this concept, groups might consider forming Dividend Clubs as a membership device to stress that people are buying "stock" which will pay dividends of peace, freedom, or security when they invest in nuclear-free futures, in safe and legal abortion, or in environmental protection.

12) **Improved:** If you reprint a pamphlet or book, stress this word. If you make a change in your newsletter so that it is now typeset, rather than just typed, or printed instead of mimeoed, then call attention to it by using the word "improved." Combine this word with others, so a self-breast exam pamphlet is "New,

improved, easy to read."

13) **Buy now, pay later:** This concept, if not the words, is the basic idea behind a pledge program.

14) **Recommended:** Any time you quote a famous person or an expert talking about your organization, you are using the concept of being recommended by that person. Some groups have a sheet of paper which they include with membership mailings with quotes from famous people, people with initials after their name, and people whose lives were changed as a result of their work. It says, "Here's what they're saying about Save the Seedlings" across the top. Some of the people quoted may be identified; others merely say, "Your group is the greatest" . . . Jane X, Dayton, OH.

15) **Quality:** This is an easy one to stress for most groups, and can be worked in without much effort. (Interestingly, studies have shown that "high quality" sells better than "low price.")

16) **Service:** This word is one in use now to describe non-profits' work, particularly by organizations that provide direct service. Service is a selfless, altruistic word. It is good to know that it also sells.

17) **Safe:** If appropriate, this word is a good one to attach to a call for action, such as "Safe ways to avoid paying taxes to the military." Like *easy*, it is used to reassure people.

18) **Greater Value:** Again, a phrase that can easily be incorporated into your promotional materials. Twenty acres of virgin forest is of greater value than the proposed shopping mall.

19) **It works:** This slogan is being used at the end of many commercials, and is effective. Recently a union began using it in a television ad, "It works for all of us." People tend to believe affirmative statements that sound reasonable. Take advantage of this willingness to believe by affirming your programs as strategies that work.

20) **Thanks:** This word is probably the most important word in the non-profit dictionary. Just try to use it too often. It is probably not possible. ■

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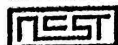
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