

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

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WHAT MAKES YOUR MINISTRY GREAT?

It's the time of year for evaluations. Maybe you are one of those campus ministries that builds in an annual time for checking out how well you're doing. If so, that's commendable. While four-year reviews are good ways of looking at the strong points of our ministries (and a few things that always need correcting), they are often quantum leaps in the evaluation process. What we need more often is to look at the smaller steps of our ministries, those day to day and month to month activities and decisions that plot the longer course for us. So maybe this is a good time to sit back and think about the question: what makes your ministry great?

You might want to think about the many ways in which your ministry is faithful to the calling of the Gospel on the campus where you serve. You might want to list those things that surfaced on your last review. You might want to imagine what students say about campus ministry to their parents or home congregation. With your board, you might find it helpful to develop a list of things you have accomplished this past year and can celebrate now that the academic year is over. Could you ask some students to write a personal paragraph about what campus ministry has meant to them this past year? If you had an hour to sit with your bishop over a cup of coffee, what would you like her/him to remember?

Kay Sprinkel Grace invites us to think about successful nonprofits.¹ She recognizes that you don't need to be venerable or rolling in dough to be successful. She says that new organizations with exciting visions and effective programs that meet community needs are certainly among those that can be called "successful" or great. Here are ten marks of those nonprofits:

1. **Unwavering vision.** Through good times and bad, up cycles and downturns, the vision of the leadership doesn't falter. We certainly have those cycles in campus ministry. Some years we are bursting with active, eager students. Other years we can fit the worshipping community in our office. Budgets are fickle. Local congregations support us, then ignore us. You know how it is. Good leadership keeps hold of the vision and doesn't panic when the years are lean. They advocate for the mission as strongly during those times as when we have lots to show for our labors. This is one of the primary tasks of the board—to keep the focus on the vision positive and steady.

¹ Kay Sprinkel Grace, *Contributions*, July-August, 2002, pp. 8-9, 15-16.

2. **Confidence.** Organizations that are confident in their mission engender confidence among their constituents. When programs are delivered and services are provided as planned, the word gets out that campus ministry can accomplish what it sets out to do. Board members stand a little taller. Staff tackle the next idea with new muscle. And people around you who know your ministry nod their heads in affirmation. Success attracts potential new funders. There is new visibility for your ministry and new appreciation for your efforts. Like the little leaguer who whacked the ball out of the park, you will have greater confidence the next time you step up to the plate.
3. **No mission drift.** Mission drift is losing sight of why you exist as an organization and focusing too much on your own issues. Its myopic, survival-oriented behavior. Leadership gets frustrated with always fussing about internal concerns like painting the bathroom, overseeing support staff deciding what kind of food to serve at the picnic. There needs to be a regular, strong connection between the work of the leadership and the mission. Be sure you're looking through windows toward the community and not into mirrors, when you do your planning, fund raising and recruitment. Keep the mission in front of you.
4. **Clarity of values.** Successful organizations are clear about what they value. They know what's at the core of their mission. It's woven into their vision and guides their staff and volunteers. Campus ministry needs to be clear about its core values and how they are communicated. What we do may be very different from what students expect, based on experiences with prior church life or parachurch groups. We can't assume that when we use "church-speak" people know what we mean by concepts like evangelism, hospitality, worship or grace. We need to be clear so that we can be clear with others.
5. **A sense of abundance.** As Christian communities, we should have this one right. But how often do we encounter whining about what we don't have, instead of thankfulness for what we do have. A sense of abundance moves us from a survival mentality to one of appreciation for the wealth of what we do have for doing ministry. Instead of focusing on the needs of your organization, focus instead on the needs you are meeting. The spirit of abundance is contagious.
6. **Courage.** While this is often characteristic of individual leaders and staff, it is true also of organizations. It takes courage to move in new directions or reassign resources to advance the success of your mission. It takes courage to make tough decisions about people and programs, especially if they have been in place for some time. It takes courage to talk honestly about finances and resource management. It takes courage to develop a new mission direction when the old one no longer serves realistically. It takes courage to advocate for certain issues or populations on campus. A "shy" ministry loses its voice and gives up its right to speak with and for young adults on campus.
7. **Transparency and regular communication.** A strong organization is transparent about its mission, performance, problems and achievements. Instead of putting up a successful image on all fronts, a transparent organization is willing and able to share with its constituents. Your donors, friends, alums, congregations, and the wider community want to understand and need to know what's going on. Strong organizations are not afraid to publish annual reports that are honest about participation and resources. If we truly view contributions as investments, we need to let our donors, the investors in our ministries, know our strengths and struggles.

8. **An emphasis on donor development, not just fund raising.** More and more we are realizing that the best fund raising is the development of solid relationships. Donor development/stewardship is the key to a strong, ongoing base of support. The time spent with current donors far outweighs the effort spent on acquiring new donors—although that, too, is important. Don't forget the friends you have as you search for new ones. Donor loyalty distinguishes successful organizations. In campus ministry our most loyal supporters are those students who have recently graduated. As they move from campus to new jobs, locations and loyalties, how can we keep them loyal and committed to the church on campus, from which they presumably benefited?
9. **Continual planning.** Successful organizations are always working on the planning process. There may be a "five year plan," but the horizon keeps moving ahead of you. A kind of "rolling base" planning process requires an annual evaluation of the current progress and an addition of another year on the front end. Strategies change and priorities shift. Continual planning reflects these changes. Donors expect your organization to be sensitive to its environment and to be shaped somewhat by it. When a budget crunch hits the university, for example, how does that affect your strategic plan? What might you do differently if the university announces a shift to admitting more graduate students than undergrads?
10. **Respect, camaraderie and fun.** How wonderful it is to work with an organization that has respect for board members, volunteers and staff! There is a strong sense of team, where everyone's ideas are honored, and everyone has a valued voice. There is flexibility, honesty, encouragement, and, often joy. Ours is a serious work, but its also a place to celebrate with good fun. Anniversaries, completed projects, new or departing staffer board members, provide structured ways to show respect. How many other ways might you invite celebration into the life of your ministry?

We have great campus ministries. Yours is one of them. Take some time over the summer months to celebrate your greatness and think about how it can become even greater. It will give you the energy you need to begin planning for the next academic year.

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