

Development Companion

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

Everyone is in Public Relations

By David J. Baker, APR

How Welcoming is Your Organization?

An unfriendly attitude, failure to recognize your biggest donor on the phone, misdirecting phone calls - these are just a few of the things that can alienate your supporters and make them take their money elsewhere. Don't let this happen to you!

Do you know what your staff members say about your organization? How they talk to colleagues, donors, clients, even to their friends and neighbors, speaks volumes about your organization.

The receptionist who takes the calls; the development officer who cultivates relationships; the data entry clerk who records the gifts; each one's job description should include the words "responsible for the image of the organization." We all know that it doesn't, and yet these people can make or break your nonprofit.

Is there anyone who has never said: "I will never do business with them again?" How many times have you been affected by discourtesy or incompetence? And doesn't that reflect badly on the organization?

- Would you expect a donor to support your nonprofit if their experience has been negative?
- Would you donate to a cause after you overhear one of the staff trashing his employer at a public event?

In This Issue

How Welcoming is Your Organization?

Unintended Consequences

Training Your Staff

Include No One Out

Recent Issues Available on Request:

- "Do-It-Yourself Planned Giving".....Vol. Eight, Num. 4*
- "Your Capital Campaign: Organize to Win.....Vol. Eight, Num.3*
- "Governance as Leadership".....Vol. Eight, Num. 2*
- "Building and Keeping an Effective Governing Board – Part II".....Vol. Eight, Num. 1*
- "Building and Keeping an Effective Governing Board – Part I".....Vol. Seven, Num. 4*
- "Development is A Team Effort".....Vol. Seven, Num. 3*
- "1,2,3 Easy Steps to Begin Your Planned Giving Program".....Vol. Seven, Num. 2*

Steps to Better Communication - A Course for Every Need

- **Level One:** How to deal effectively with inquiries, telephone calls, and fellow employees while honing communication skills between supervisors and subordinates. Focus on giving instructions, pitching an idea, and getting your point across.
- **Level Two:** Presentation and public speaking skills, encounters with difficult people, and discussion and practice of speaking and presentation situations.
- **Level Three:** Intensive media relations training covering message development, on-camera work, and critique.

Unintended Consequences

Consider the receptionist who chews gum, gabbles the company name, and misdirects your call. . . .

Consider the customer service rep who offers empathy but won't take ownership of your problem and solve it

Consider the staffer who talks to the media and voices an opinion that is at odds with what your CEO just told the same reporter. . . .

These are actual examples of damage that can be done by staff for want of training and awareness. In most cases, staff members are not consciously trying to scuttle your nonprofit's reputation, but all of these - and more - affect the image of your organization. You depend on your staff to maintain the positive image you have worked so hard to create. And yet, how much effort do you put into making sure that

your people represent your organization as you would wish? How do you know that your development effort is not being sabotaged by this sort of inadvertent communication?

Organizations can spend millions to develop their public face to best advantage. But, dollars spent on external public relations will be wasted if employees don't present the same image of the organization that you have invested so much to create.

Training Your Staff

When planning the strategy for communication, it is vital to include the employee audience. Staff members need to be prepared to advance your mission in professional as well as personal situations. To do that they need to be informed, and they need to be prepared, and they need to understand your mission and your message.

DeWitt & Associates, Inc. offers a full range of services to meet each client's needs.

Among them are:

- ✦ Building and operating effective programs to raise friends and funds
- ✦ Capital campaign planning and counsel
- ✦ Campaign readiness studies
- ✦ Improving/beginning annual fund programs
- ✦ Marketing and communications programs
- ✦ Strategic planning that builds prospect ownership
- ✦ Case statement development and use
- ✦ Electronic prospect research and donor data systems
- ✦ 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



Finally, they must be trained to present the appropriate image and to avoid accidentally undermining the mission.

The first step in preparing your staff is to listen to what they say to people. Call your office anonymously some time and hear how the phones are being answered. Find out how quickly gifts are acknowledged. How are information requests being dealt with? Answers to questions like these will give you a sense of what is going on and tell you whether you need to do something about it - and if so, what.

A CEO called his assistant from a taxi asking her to meet him at the airport with some forgotten papers. He was so surprised by the receptionist who could not say the company name properly, and then misdirected his call, that he canceled his trip and returned to the office immediately to put a training program in place.

The second step you may want to consider is to conduct

communications training for those who deal directly with your publics. What about presentation skills training for those who are meeting customers or donors? What about media relations training for your spokespeople?

You have no spokespeople? Even more reason to train people to represent your organization should a reporter show up. It can happen at any time.

An accident on your property, a robbery, an outbreak of illness, these are beyond your control, but each can bring reporters to your door. You need to be prepared to respond in the best way for your organization.

It is a curiosity that through all the educational experiences we pursue either formally or informally, the one area that is not addressed well is communicating. In spite of the fact that we all communicate every day, most of us have had no instruction in how to do it effectively. Don't assume that your staff knows how to communicate. They have probably never had any formal training.

Given that, is it any wonder that organizations can offend people through misunderstanding, miscommunication or poor service.

Every encounter anyone has with your organization should reinforce their relationship with you. You can ensure that this will happen if your staff is prepared through appropriate training. This will range from a program to prepare everyone to deal effectively with public inquiries, telephone calls, and each other to more sophisticated training for intermediate and senior staff in presentation and public speaking skills and preparing senior staff and spokespeople for media contact.

An experienced consultant can conduct an audit of your current communications and recommend a course of training to prepare your people to respond appropriately and to serve their publics as you would wish. You can maximize your advancement efforts by giving your staff the tools to do their jobs effectively and to represent your organization appropriately wherever they go.

Everyone in your organization wears their employee hat as part of their identity when they are on the job, talking to neighbors, or buying groceries on the weekend. Make the most of your investment in your staff by making sure they represent you as you would wish all the time.

Include No One Out

This paraphrase of the well-worn expression is meant to help you think holistically about the people who communicate your nonprofit mission and who maintain and build a positive environment in which you can raise friends and funds. A corporation here in Richmond gives the title "Directors of First Impressions" to its receptionists. Service personnel (custodians, cafeteria employees, book store clerks, etc.) are also important parts of your organization presenting a welcoming and caring environment for clients, parents, students, patients, and others whom you serve and who are part of your supportive constituency.

To be added to the e-mail distribution list, send your request to:

brydon.dewitt@verizon.net

or visit

dewittandassociates.com

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DeWitt & Associates, Inc.

12701 Crimson Court
Richmond, Virginia 23233
Telephone: 804.364.0145
and
P.O. Box 1481
Staunton, Virginia 24402
Telephone: 540.885.1049

Facsimile: 804.364.0148

Website: <http://dewittandassociates.com>

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DeWitt & Associates

Brydon M. DeWitt
President

Len Doran, CFRE
Senior Executive Counsel

David J. Baker, APR
Senior Counsel

D. Kay Malone, J.D.
Senior Counsel

Louis M. Markwith
Senior Counsel

Valerie J. Mann
Grant Writing Specialist