Notes for May 2014 Breakfast

**EVENTS:**

Trend towards the extremes – either go big or go home – literally. House parties are a great way to have friends invite friends to learn about your mission. Works really well as a volunteer recruitment tool. Also works well with “well-connected” boards and sets of stakeholders. Can be low cost, low stress but needs to be done super well.

Big galas: need to consider your audience and cater to them. Young, hip crowd – have loud music and enough bartenders. Room of retired folks, make sure they can hear. Consider a readable powerpoint that follows key points of a speech – highlighting the most important points you want to make.

Always make sure your sound system is appropriate for the size of the room. Consider wireless mikes if you have lots of speakers/presenters.

You must have a mission moment. Want them to hear from your clients – do a “you tube” quality video in the field. Recently saw a great one of board members at the camp, surrounded by kids having a great time. Made us “feel” the mission by visually seeing it in action. If appropriate, don’t be afraid to make your audience cry.

Show your community impact.

Have your theme be mission affirming. Healthy baby organization – throw a baby shower luncheon. Marathon Kids – super hero kids theme – empowering kids to be healthy. Breast Cancer Resource Center – bra fashion show. Animal shelter – dog parade or style show.

If you have a room full of people invited as guests of table hosts and sponsors, have various ways for individuals to give. Do not let guests go away from your event with all of their money in their pockets. Paddles up, raffle tickets, surprise boxes, envelopes on the table. Whatever it takes for those guests to have an opportunity to choose to support your organization.

Check in should be a 5 minute process. Period. Do NOT make people wait in line to get the party started. If you think this could be an issue, do passed appetizers and free cocktails. Can’t afford to give away alcohol? Have waiters available to take and deliver bar orders to people in line. Seriously. Do not have people wait in line for 30 – 45 minutes. Have ample volunteers available to assist with check in.

And have ample bartenders to work the crush of orders before your program really gets started. Do not let the venue tell you they aren’t necessary. You should have 1 bartender for every 60 – 80 people and separate bar spaces for every 200-250 people. Do the math – that is 3 people working a bar in each of three corners of your 650 person event.

Have 3 – 4 people (volunteers) willing and excited to help with post-event tasks like hand written thank you notes, auction item pick up, accounting and reconciliation tasks, inventory and boxing up supplies. Thank you phone calls to major sponsors and donors. This is a super important job that always gets short changed. Have people willing to use their energy to properly thank and engage the people you just entertained.

Host mission events… do tours, show people your impact. Engage them in a process, have them work with or next to a client. Let them get dirty, engaged, moved.

Which leads us to **Major Donors.**

Don’t be afraid to ask “what do you want to do? What do you want to know about us? How would you like to interact with us?”

Once had a donor tell me, if you don’t feel comfortable enough to ask me what I want, I don’t know you well enough to give you a major gift.

**Finances**

Solid financial controls, checked and reviewed regularly, adjusted to reflect the division of tasks within the day-to-day framework of the office and staff available. What does this mean? Do everything you can with what you have… don’t take someone else’s controls and force them to work --- adapt until they work smoothly, efficiently and effectively while still mitigating risk and exposure.

Two year budgets – super important to be looking longer term especially with regards to questions of sustainability, expansion, etc.

**Succession plans.** Every great leader – staff, volunteer, board – should have at least an idea of their exit strategy. Organizations shouldn’t be afraid to ask key stakeholders about the future. Board members have term limits – everyone needs to honor those and plan accordingly. EDs sometimes stay for decades, others leave after a few years. Project chairs eventually hand over leadership to someone else. Having a plan creates stability and professionalism. If every person walks into a job with a sense of how they are going to walk out, you will be a strong organization able to weather any storm.

**Strategic Planning** – you don’t need to do a full strategic plan but you have to understand your agency priorities. When you wake up and get ready for work, do you have a clear plan of action of what you are going to accomplish today, or do you spend your whole day putting out fires and getting pushed and pulled by others? If you aren’t a fireman or Elasti-girl, you aren’t don’t your job right.