

Thriving In Uncertainty

“A Success Template for Achieving Breakthrough Ideas”ⁱ

Everyone from donors to advisors to nonprofit leaders has questions right now about charitable giving, each from their own perspective. This is nothing new to nonprofit veterans. Uncertainty, adaptability, creativity, connectivity, and knowledge rule the day. The new definitive is that the same ole’ anything will probably not work. It’s a time of changing and growing. It’s a time of releasing what doesn’t work so that new patterns may form. It’s the gap between releasing and new formation that is unsettling; however, systems break down in order to re-build.

Nonprofit leaders and visionaries know that making the most of what they have inspires innovative solutions. For instance, consistent network expansion, for those who prioritized it, is paying off now as nonprofits can tap creative talents within these networks and connect to other individuals and organizations doing the same. What many nonprofits are asking now is, “how can we be the best stewards of the resources we have and continue to attract new resources for growth?”

What we know that won’t work

1. “We’ve always done it this way.” This is not a good reason to continue doing anything the same way. It’s a stuck mentality. If you’re serious about stewarding the funds you have, then examine every process by breaking it down into small steps to see if there are any ways to improve. You may find that you can save staff time by consolidating some steps.
2. Assuming people won’t give. Givers always give. They may change timetables and strategies so your attentiveness to each and every one of your donors is important now.
3. Avoiding seeing prospective donors. “People don’t want to see me. They know I’m going to ask for money.” First of all, how could this be true? They’ve already shown with their past gifts that they believe in the work you do and that doesn’t change overnight. Doing your job for the mission you support means continuing to communicate the need, challenges and impact your organization can make with their continued help. Show your donors that you value their insights by maintaining, even increasing personal contact and they will stand by you.
4. Assuming you know the extent of someone’s resources. Your donors may not have told you everything and the IRA Rollover Provision, bequests, and retirement plans may be viable options for additional resources. Finally, people out there who have never supported nonprofit causes before may have discretionary funds and be inspired now, at a time when they can make a profound difference.
5. Complaining, excuses, and focusing on the negative.

Making the most of what you have

Ask questions about why you’re doing what you’re doing. This can be a healthy exercise for the board because they will learn more about the internal workings of the organization and each other. Put everything your organization does on the table and examine how you do it and the results of it to see if

there are ways to improve. Let go of what is not working. *Keep in mind that this is not personal.* No one person wins or loses here. Base suggestions on the good of the organization.

Maximize results. “Think: highest and best use of your time, money, and effort.” In his book, *Getting Everything You Can Out of All You’ve Got*, author Jay Abraham says to focus your thinking on fundamental objectives for achieving breakthrough ideas.

Success Template for Achieving Breakthrough Ideas (Adapted for nonprofits from p. 46)

- The best breakthroughs reduce risk or resistance from the other side. This makes it easier to say yes than no and all sides benefit. Success is not when one side wins and the other loses, rather it is finding what works for everyone concerned.
- Engineer maximum success into every action you take or decision you make. If you reduce what you’re currently doing so that more effort can be invested in what you do well, your outcomes will be more productive. Re-consider spending the time you spend with things that drain you and delegate to others’ strengths.
- Build a breakthrough foundation based upon multiple streams of idea generation instead of a single idea source. Accept that the idea you come up with opens the conversation and that it will be improved, modified, even changed for the better as others work with it.
- One of your breakthrough goals is to always make you, your nonprofit, or your product special, unique, and more advantageous in the eyes of your constituents. This is important when so many nonprofits pursue “quality of life,” and “excellence.” How can you be distinctive? Ask loyal donors for insight here. Their answers may surprise you.
- The more value you can create and the more value it creates for others, the greater the power of the breakthrough. This cultivates greater vision, inclusivity, and service.
- Breakthroughs increase in direct proportion to the amount of networking, brainstorming, and masterminding you do with like-minded, success-driven people outside your industry. Keep options open all the time and expect innovation to come from unusual places.

These fundamentals generate new energy for familiar circumstances. By focusing energies on achieving breakthroughs, new possibilities emerge. They are endless. What can you do today to take a step away from things that don’t work toward more things that do?

ⁱ Abraham, J. (2000). *Getting Everything You Can Out of All You’ve Got*, New York: St. Martin’s Press.