

Second Chances—What to do if a campaign has failed

By

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Everyone wants to succeed. I have met few people who are so apathetic and uninterested in success that they don't care if they lose, and usually there is a demoralizing reason why these few individuals have reached this low point in life. However, that shouldn't be the "personality" of a church. Succeeding in a vibrant church life and experience is usually the desired norm for any congregation. Yet a campaign that showed much promise, yet fizzled, failed or flubbed in some way can demoralize a church family quite quickly.

How often have I heard some of these statements or questions! "What happened? What happened to the money we did raise? How long is this campaign going to go on? It's been years already! Did we accomplish anything? I'm tired of the whole thing! Let's sell the building and start over somewhere else!"

A capital campaign, whether raising funds for a new building, renovation, special project, or even material goods such as pews or a new organ, can be a revitalizing and exciting effort—and at the same time can tear a church apart. So what might you be able to do if your campaign didn't reach its goal; the congregation is weary of hearing about it, much less giving to it; and a negative mood prevails?

- a) Assess what really happened. And share that assessment with at least a leading group of church members if not the entire congregation. Members who are "in the know" will probably be more supportive of a second campaign, a new effort, even if they gripe in the process.
- b) Was there an understanding that preparation is the key to success, that actually asking for the money is a result of good preparation? The 80/20 rule usually plays out in some way, with about 80% preparation and 20% or less spent in asking for the funds.
- c) Were people allowed to give smaller donations because it was a premature request for a gift, it was a group "ask," or wasn't personalized? Just like in the early days of texting donations which took hold quickly during the Haiti crisis, people realized that donors were giving \$10 when they could easily have given much more if asked at the right time and in the right way, so at times church campaigns flounder because there was no plan or structure.
- d) Did something occur, like a financial crisis or an emergency such as a boiler blowing up, that inhibited a campaign? Has this been part of the information that has been shared, which puts an entirely different perspective on a failed campaign?

Once you have determined the answers to the above points and questions, and no doubt more analysis could occur, perhaps consider these aspects of a renewed effort, a “new” campaign.

- a) Consider the “new” campaign a “second phase.” If a clear structure wasn’t part of the original campaign plan, then a second phase is reasonable and will raise fewer questions than just saying, “let’s start over.”
- b) Analyze who could give again. Have people really been given ample opportunity to give to what interests them, or was the appeal a general one? Has it been recognized that some can give more than others, and have these people been given the opportunity to participate at a greater level?
- c) Consider who outside of the church family could also give, and why. What connections are there, such as places of employment, vendors, former or even lapsed members, families? If your campaign has components other than just worship, your potential for additional donors increases (e.g., a feeding program for the homeless, therefore a larger, well-equipped kitchen).
- d) Celebrate and acknowledge what already has been accomplished. Provide recognition to those who were exemplary in giving and in leading the campaign.
- e) Divide the second phase into components or “giving groups/circles” whereby people can choose to raise smaller amounts for what really interests or affects them. This makes a larger goal seem more feasible to reach.
- f) Make prayer a part of your campaign. God does move people’s hearts and gives us a chance to do it right the second time even as we put forth our best, knowledgeable efforts.