



Strategies for Success

Smart fundraising ideas from Hartsook

Hope for the Best, Plan for Contingencies



Airline passengers hear the pre-flight safety briefing so often, it can become background noise along with the sound of engines and air vents. If we knew an emergency situation was on the horizon, we would listen up, but we are counting on everything going as planned.

Fundraisers can be similarly optimistic: “Our current donors will keep giving regularly.” “We won’t have another economic downturn anytime soon.” “No unexpected financial crisis is in our organization’s future.” “We’re good.”

While remaining optimistic, revisit the basics from time to time:

Keep your seatbelt fastened at all times in case of unexpected turbulence.

Endowments and cash reserves aren’t for pessimists. They’re for realists. If you have a building, you need an endowment. If you have staff or vendors who like to get paid, you need a buffer between revenue and expenses. It doesn’t always occur, but turbulence happens.

Note the location of your nearest exit, understanding that it may be behind you.

Don’t assume your loyal donors will always be there. Donor relationships must be maintained and enriched through ongoing communication, accountability, and demonstrations of appreciation. Be alert to the signs if a donor grows distant. If you need to walk back and say, “We’re sorry” or “Thank you” in a more compelling well, do it.

Always place on your own air mask before helping those around you.

A nonprofit cannot run on good intentions for long. Constituents will not be well served if an organization ignores its own financial well being. Before launching a new program—no matter how great it sounds—assess your current capacity: “Are we satisfied with our current outcomes?” “Can we financially sustain a new program?” “Do we have the staff to pull it off?”

When it comes to your nonprofit’s future, stay optimistic. Hope for the best, but plan for contingencies.

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