

Killing Me Softly

How to gracefully transition a long time event and live to tell about it

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Whose Idea Was This, Anyway?

Orders from above

- New administration often want to put their own brand on things. If they're your boss - and you want to keep your job - you need to do it. Somehow.

Within your department

- You are responsible for raising the money. You're working hard - is your event?

Grassroots

- Volunteers, donors, constituents all have ideas. Even if they are bad ideas, you probably need to listen to them.

Change is Good... right?

The Good,
The Bad,
and the Ugly



Some Examples and Suggestions


The Good - Tradition has meaning

- "100th Anything" sounds cool. And it is.
- Traditions bring people together - like donors
- Even the best events can be enlivened with fresh ideas



The Good Example - A Class Act?

- You have a century of tradition behind you.
- But the school has always done reunions only for the "landmark" years, 10, 20, 50 and so on.
- And people know there will be Bratwurst and Beer Night. That's in keeping with your image... isn't it?



The Good - only Better

- Add "All Years" to the list. It's called "cultivation"...
- Try cross-pollinating the event. Get the Old Geezers to mentor Recent Grads
- How about changing the Brat and Beer to NW Wines and Farmer's Market?



The Bad - The '90s called...

Everything gets dated. Has your event looked in the mirror recently?

Does your event really reflect the image you want your donors to see and the public to associate you with?



Bad Example - The 90's called... They want their Visa card back

Lavish auctions and conspicuous consumption are passe'. And do they really fit your organization's mission?

Pay attention to the current economy - your donors are.



The Bad - Not So Much

- If you must do an auction, do you have a paddle raise?
- Have you tried the (equally time-honored) Heartfelt Speech, Free Food and Kleenex event?
- Can you use that gift basket as a way to capture new names for your list as a survey completion incentive?
- Can that "Spa Day" donation be given to a shelter, helping people in need and garnering you some cool publicity?
- "Gift-in-kind" isn't a bad word. Hyphenated or not.

Ugly Example - Send in the Clones

One size does not fit all.



Ugly Example - Everyone Else is Doing It



Transplanting another organization's event onto yours is going to be awkward, at best. That only works in Vegas... sort of.

The Ugly - Made over

- Think “hybrid”, not clone.
- Blend your mission further into the event
- Build bridges, collaborate with other organizations.
- Think “synergy” not “synthetic”



Caveat Development

- Just like events, this list of suggested changes should change over time, too.
- Trends are dictated by the economy, funders, fashion, Hollywood, politics, bosses, culture... be flexible.
- Proceed with tact, or at least care. Beginnings are fragile times. Endings can be murder.

Ask yourself these questions to help determine if the event must die

(In polite company, this is called “Blessing and Releasing” the event.)

Top Ten Killer Questions

- 1 Does the current event inspire, educate or cultivate?
- 2 Does it help build long-term relationships rather than being a “one hit wonder”?

Top Ten Killer Questions, continued

- 3 Is it interesting enough to entice new prospects to return and Old Faithfuls to be ambassadors of the event to their friends?
- 4 Does the event go beyond entertaining and actually convey the mission of your organization?

Top Ten Killer Questions, continued

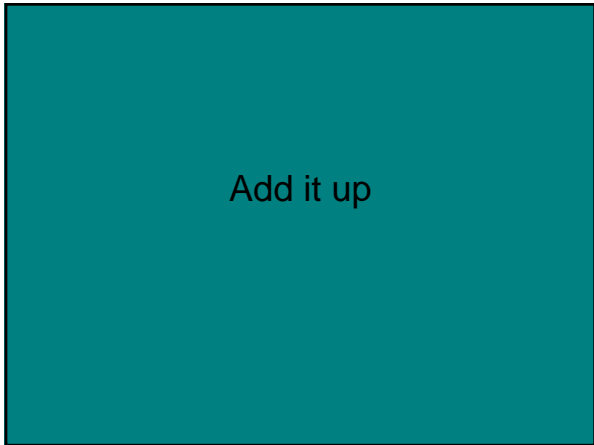
- 5 Did the guests leave your event knowing more about your organization than when they came?
- 6 Do the attendees have a real opportunity to comment on the event?

Top Ten Killer Questions, continued

- 7 If they do, are you listening?
- 8 Do you convey your needs, showcase your cool stuff and extraordinary competence THEN ask for money?

Top Ten Killer Questions, continued

- 9 Does the event have a set follow-up beyond the donation acknowledgement?
- 10 Do new volunteers and/or staff want to work on this event?



SCORE CARD

9-10 points:

Your event is on the right track. Just keep checking this list each year. Live Long and Prosper.



SCORE CARD

7-8 points:

There's room for improvement even on good events. Instead of creating another decorations committee, create a Task Force that is charged with tweaking things until you can say "yes" to at least one more point.



SCORE CARD

4-6 points:

Check for a pulse. The event is either dying or sickly. Give it an infusion of creativity, bolster it with your mission and think about adding some new volunteers to the mix for a fresh look at things.



SCORE CARD

0-3 points:

You have an UnDead Event. Just kill it.



Now that you know The Event Must Die, you must become...

The Terminator



You're gonna need this...
the Zombie Death Squad Tool Kit



Houston, we have a problem



So you've decided the Event That Will Not Die simply must die.

How do you kill it when everyone either loves it or inertia has taken a strong hold on bosses or boards?

Speak Softly and Carry a Big Mission

Point out that your event is here, and the mission is waaaaay over there. Nicely.

Find out how the disconnect happened - ask an old timer, or consult the files for the origins of the event.

If the original impetus/person behind the event is gone, use this opportunity to involve new people and bring fresh ideas, create a stronger sense of ownership.

Let the Money do the Talking

Speak their language - hard facts, figures and ROI analysis will get their attention.

Get feedback on events from funders - third party influence helps.



Get them to think it's their idea

Take a decision maker to an event that you admire. Let them see for themselves how it can be done, and be sure to give them final results to clinch the deal.



Go to the Admirable Event alone if you need to. Mark the program with final results. Leave it where it will be found.

When all else fails, get it on the agenda

Conduct a review of your events. If you hit resistance, try the "it's been a year since the market collapse" approach.

Analyze the cost in terms of dollars spent, volunteer and staff hours required. Be factual.

Get it on the agenda for the next department meeting. Go through proper channels while doing this. You're the Terminator, not Superman.

Let's Play a Game!
Put some fun back in fundraising

Let's Play A Game!

Put your organization's name and event name on the handy piece of paper.

Or use a code name if you wish to protect the innocent.

Draw an emoticon of how your event makes you feel.

Very briefly, state the biggest problem you have with the event, if there is one.



Interactive - Can this event be saved?
Let's go fish for an event.
See how it makes them feel?
What could you do to improve it?

Thank you for playing.
Thank you for attending.
Thank you for all you do for our community.

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