



Resources

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Leadership in Times of Change

There is a Haitian saying that translates roughly as, “Beyond the mountains, there are mountains.” In other words, there will always be new problems to solve, and unexpected internal or external challenges to overcome. This edition of “Resources” is focused on how organizations can be better prepared to deal with whatever awaits them on the other side of today’s challenges. Veteran consultant and trainer Rich Male (www.richardmale.com) allowed us to reprint these thoughts from his e-newsletter, “Rich Tips.”

**“Beyond the Mountains,
there are Mountains”**

Every now and then organizations go through great turmoil, crisis and/or change. Perhaps a major funding source has just notified your organization that it won’t be receiving a large grant you were counting on, or a government agency refuses the continuation of a contract, or the CEO of 15 years announces she is leaving the organization, or a staff member runs off with \$250,000 and the media is all over it. Leading an organization during these times requires great skill, patience, and finesse.

Leaders are judged in times of adversity and change *not* in times of success. In the face of turmoil and change we tend to look for leaders that are simultaneously strong and compassionate. It seems like we have to go through a crisis every once in a while to allow our true leadership qualities to come to the surface.

Let’s look at some of the competencies and skills that are required to steer the ship through the waters of transition and change:

- 1. Catalyzing people around change.** Change happens whether we like it or not, and it is the leader’s responsibility to galvanize others to understand and embrace the process and dynamics of change.
- 2. Effective leadership is about recognizing the personal and emotional difficulties people have with change.** Even social change organizations don’t like change! It is important to realize that the leader’s role is to keep the team together.
- 3. Being tough but empathetic** is about making difficult decisions while listening to and involving the organization’s staff and volunteers.
- 4. The concept of urgency without crisis** is critical to gain the confidence of your staff. I used to make the mistake of telling my staff immediately when we were turned down for a major grant. Now, I hold off telling the staff until I can discuss with them the strategy for moving ahead so they are not feeling as if the organization is on the brink of closing up shop.
- 5. A sense of optimism** is critical. I thought the world would crash down on me when I was a teenager and I asked a girl out and she turned me down. Having a sense of history and realizing that the sun will rise tomorrow and that we need to believe in ourselves and the people around us is very important.

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6. **Trusting others** is at the core of having faith in your staff and believing that they want the same thing out of the transition as you do. It also means being open to input from people around you so you don't have to make all of the decisions by yourself.
7. **The buck stops with the Executive Director.** The CEO/Executive Director will eventually be called upon to make very difficult decisions, therefore s/he must be able to be decisive during times of transition. There are some decisions that **only** this leader can make for the organization.
8. **Realism is important** during these times. It's clear that during transition we need to take off our "rose colored glasses" and look at the world as it is rather than as we want it to be. Sometimes we need to make quick decisions that are not in the best interests of certain individuals, but ARE in the best interest of the organization. Ultimately, it is the organization rather than the individuals that we are mandated to change.
9. **Risk is part of the process of change and transition.** We need to be able to risk and take chances within reason to steer through troubled times. We have to be open to try new approaches, to learn new things, and to feel comfortable "being on the edge and ledge." Sometimes it is on the ledge where growth really takes place.

Trusting your instincts is one of the most sacred qualities during volatile times. After we have talked with our board, staff and other advisors to help us deal with a crisis situation, ultimately it comes down to "what we feel is right."

Handling the Tough Times

Many environmental advocates know educator, artist and veteran activist Rose Sackey-Milligan from her long tenure as a Program Officer at the Peace Development Fund. She now directs the social justice program at the Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society, in Northampton, MA (www.comtemplativemind.org). The Center promotes the use of inspirational practices—ranging from tai chi to meditation to simple rituals—in a variety of settings, including nonprofit organizations. We asked Rose to share a few thoughts on the steps grassroots organizations can take to bring clarity and balance to their work in the face of stress or crisis.

Those on the frontlines of social justice work, and the organizations for which they work, face many challenges as they confront suffering and a powerful global economic system. When left unattended, such challenges often lead to burnout or spiritual crisis. Burnout, though often referred to as an individual phenomena, can occur on the collective level too. One clear sign of a crisis is losing perspective of the long view of change. Here are a few tips that may help sustain staff and board cohesiveness when the going gets tough:

- Numerous studies have reported the benefits of meditation, yoga and stillness in the workplace, and many people are finding these ancient practices useful. Tremendous benefits can come to employees who take part in these contemplative practices together. At times, when everyone in an organization is on the verge of a serious crisis, or simply overworked and overwhelmed, it can be worthwhile for everyone to select a practice and do it in community.
- Relational practices, such as council circles, storytelling, deep listening, and appreciative inquiry, allow new ways to deal with conflict resolution between individuals and groups. When race, class or gender issues cause organizational crisis, "deep listening" or engaged dialogue has been proven to bring more "breathing room" into the discussions and result in more productive conversations. In a council circle, a technique with origins in Native American traditions, the only one speaking is the one holding the talking stick. Uninterrupted listening allows everyone to go deeper into his or her own self. Council circles allow people to speak more clearly, with less resistance, compassionately and from the heart.
- When a group is experiencing financial and other types of emergencies, the typical "western" response is often blame, judgment and anger. Some of the tension caused by immediate, emotional challenges — layoffs, cutbacks or dissolution-- can be diffused when everyone agrees to stop, slow down, breathe, and reflect in a moment of silence. These moments can be taken at the beginning, during the middle and the end of meetings designed to bring resolution. Several organizations have noted that this technique helps reduce the potential for everyone to feel and become "unglued."
- Most importantly, for all of these techniques to bear individual and collective fruit, contemplative practices must be valued organizational principles. In times of organizational strain and crisis, contemplative practice must also become automatic or second nature and well ingrained in the culture and psyche of the organization. To be an effective organization requires board and staff to move effortlessly between periods of intense activity, disengagement, and crisis. In Buddhist terminology, one must surrender to episodes of low motivation, exhaustion, burnout and other normal predicaments, in order to allow the organization the space to develop a clear strategy of how to respond. Pushing everyone harder in the face of exhaustion is unsustainable for everyone in the long term.

Let's stop, slow down, and take care of ourselves, because our organizational effectiveness depends on it.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT CENTER 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Environmental Support Center is to promote the quality of the natural environment, human health and community sustainability by increasing the organizational effectiveness of local, state, and regional organizations working on environmental issues and for environmental justice.



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A Letter From Our Executive Director

In 2005 the Environmental Support Center took time to celebrate our 15th Anniversary of strengthening grassroots environmental justice and environmental activist groups. We had gatherings of groups we have worked with, our supporters, and current and former board and staff in Chattanooga, Seattle, San Francisco and here in Washington. It is important for us, for the front line advocacy organizations whose work we support and indeed for everyone to acknowledge and honor victories and important moments.

When we weren't marveling at the many accomplishments of the grassroots groups we supported over the past 15 years, we worked to improve our services and our own organization. We provided capacity building grants, training and advice, and technology equipment for 190 groups. We worked with a pilot group of organizations in our newest program, Fundraising for Sustainable Organizations (FUNDS), which will become fully operational in 2006, providing help with revenue diversification and sustainability. Practicing what we preach, we made use of the 15th Anniversary to significantly increase donations to ESC from individual donors.

We had a great success in hiring a new Director of Programs, Judy Hatcher, who brings many years of experience providing funding, training and consultation to grassroots organizations. Our board continued its process of renewal, bringing in three new leaders from the environmental justice and environmental activist movements.

One of our most important activities in 2005 was the beginning of long-term work on dismantling racism. Board and staff have gone through trainings together and have begun to address the impact of racism in American society on our organization and on our work. This will inform all we do but especially the development of a new strategic plan.

We look forward to another 15 years of building power at the grassroots and with your help that work will have even more impact in years to come.

Sincerely, Jim Abernathy

Program Year in Review

Last year the Environmental Support Center provided funds for critical technical assistance to over 190 groups around the country, primarily through three programs: Technology Resources, Training and Organizational Assistance, and the Leadership and Enhanced Assistance Program.

The Technology Resources program, led by Stan Johnson, gave invaluable assistance to over 35 environmental justice groups in the southeastern and southwestern parts of the country, ranging from Miami's Power U Center for Social

Change to the Youth Leadership Organization of San Antonio. According to the grateful Yvette Ammerman, president of the Get the Lead Out Coalition in El Paso, "With our new equipment, our message can now be developed both professionally and efficiently. We have been fighting a Goliath... your organization helped put a stone in an empty slingshot."

Typical of the Tech Resources program is Stan's work with Sand Mountain Concerned Citizens, an all-volunteer organization in rural Pisgah, Alabama. The group organizes to stop the water supplies from being polluted by the growing number of hog farms in the area. Despite the lack of paid

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staff, they are active in statewide coalitions and were instrumental in keeping the farm industry from further weakening environmental regulations. Still, four thousand hogs produce as much waste as 16,000 people; hog farms in Alabama are allowed to flush the untreated waste into open ponds.

The volunteers of Sand Mountain were dependent on an assortment of aging home computers to get the work done. In the field, they wanted to be able to record the environmental violations they were addressing. Stan assessed their technology needs and provided the organization with a new computer, a multi-function printer/scanner/fax/copier, an LCD projector for presentations and a compact but high-quality digital camcorder for recording evidence, as well as software, a backup device and a firewire card (which helps download film onto a computer).

The Training and Organizational Assistance Program helped more than 150 groups with the costs of training, facilitation, meetings, consultation and other expenses associated with internal capacity-building. As is usually the case, the majority of requests focused on strategic planning and fundraising, although others were helped with issues like financial management, organizing, online or “e-advocacy” and membership development. There has been an increase in requests for branding, where an organization assesses its own identity and how that is communicated to others.

The Leadership and Enhanced Assistance Program (LEAP) works closely with a small group of organizations over the course of two years, as teams from participating groups lead their organizations through a significant institutional planning or change process. The following groups were formally accepted into the program in 2005, with a kick-off orientation for the teams in Atlanta in January:

- Alabama Environmental Council (Alabama)
- Georgia River Network (Georgia)
- GreenFaith (New Jersey)
- People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER) (California)
- Western Slope Environmental Resource Council (Colorado)

In December, teams representing the following organizations “graduated” from LEAP, at a closing weekend where they celebrated their successes:

- Border Action Network (Arizona)
- Citizen’s Environmental Coalition (New York)
- Louisiana Bucket Brigade (Louisiana)
- Illinois Environmental Council Education Fund (Illinois)
- West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (Georgia)
- West End Revitalization Association (North Carolina)

After Labor Day, we unexpectedly devoted lots of time to responding to Hurricane Katrina (see article on page 5). And in the fall we moved closer to launching the FUNDS program, intended to help groups diversify their income streams. In October, the Environmental Support Center hosted a one-day fundraising planning seminar with board and staff from four groups: Kentucky Waterways Alliance, Tewa Women United (Santa Fe), Community Coalition for Environmental Justice (Seattle) and Alianza Indigena Sin Frontera (Tucson). The groups reflected a cross-section of our program priorities, and have different levels of resources and fundraising skills. Trainers Sylvia Ledesma and Peggy Mathews walked the participants through the steps to develop and implement a fundraising plan.

Many of the organizations we work with are in the southeastern US. Through a formal collaboration with Institute for Conservation Leadership, which boosts our ability to reach advocates in the region, over 129 groups in 6 states received grants, training, peer learning and/or consulting through the Strengthening Organizations and Leaders for the Environment (SOLE-SE) program.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT CENTER
Financial Statement
for the Year Ending December 31, 2005

BALANCE SHEET

Assets	
Cash and Receivables	\$ 1,967,602
Office Equipment	\$ 16,234
Total Assets	\$ 1,983,836
Liabilities & Fund Balance	
Liabilities	\$ 654,998
Fund Balance	\$ 1,328,838
Total Liabilities & Fund Balance	\$ 1,983,836

REVENUE & EXPENSE STATEMENT

Revenues	
Grants	\$ 911,392
Individual Donations	\$ 33,264
Interest Income	\$ 31,019
Other Income	\$ 2,132
Unrealized Gains	\$ (12,235)
Realized Gains	\$ 14,646
Total Revenue	\$ 980,218
Expenses	
Program Services	\$ 1,131,167
Administrative Expenses	\$ 146,426
Fundraising Expenses	\$ 157,300
Total Expenses	\$ 1,434,893
*Deficiency of Revenue over Expenses FY05	\$ (454,674)

*Deficiency of expenses over revenue covered by prior year fund balance. ('04 fund balance equaled \$499,755) This deficiency resulted from the posting of multi-year grants in the year awarded.



Help for Hurricane-Stricken Organizations

by Judy Hatcher, Director of Programs

In the weeks after Hurricane Katrina blew onto the Gulf Coast, ESC's Technology Resources consultant, Stan Johnson, replaced a computer for the Center for Environmental and Economic Justice after the door was ripped from their office in a Biloxi church. Given the enormity of the destruction, it was a relief to be able to offer such tangible assistance. But acknowledging the Environmental Support Center's already limited resources, our staff was concerned that we would have little more to offer the groups in that region with whom we've worked over the years, and we worried about the long-term impact of the storm on the region's environment and its activists. We wondered how we might be able to support the environmental movement's ability to regroup and address a sobering list of challenges.

The answer came in two forms. First, the Belvue Fund of the Tides Foundation agreed to underwrite the cost of an assessment of environmental organizations in the states affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The resulting report, "We Want to be at the Table," was a collaboration with River Network and the Institute for Conservation Leadership. It was completed after researcher Rebecca Johnson surveyed scores of groups in November and December 2005. The report reflects the concerns of a cross-section of organizations with environmental programs, and contains recommendations of how friends and allies can help

them get back on their feet. To read the report, go to: http://www.envsc.org/challenges_in_the_gulf_coast.htm.

The second answer came in the form of a generous grant from the Public Welfare Foundation, which allowed us to make emergency grants to environmental justice organizations that were directly impacted by Katrina and Rita. Special capacity-building grants were awarded to:

- The Center for Economic and Environmental Justice (Biloxi, MS)
- Community In-power and Development Association (Port Arthur, TX)
- Gert Town Revival Initiative (New Orleans, LA)
- Mossville Environmental Action Now (Westlake, LA)
- Moving Forward Gulf Coast (Slidell, LA)
- North Gulfport Community Land Conservancy (Gulfport, LA)
- Project Awake (Coatopa, AL)
- Safe Way Back Home (Baton Rouge, LA)

We are undertaking special outreach efforts to activist organizations in these states, urging them to consider applying to our ongoing programs. As the report details, the affected organizations will need to address internal long-term challenges, ranging from rethinking their programs to revising their fundraising strategies to building new coalitions. We're grateful to these organizations' dedicated leaders — more often than not unpaid staff of grassroots groups — who are meeting the challenges left in the wake of the hurricanes, and we look forward to helping them in the years to come.

ESC Thanks its 2005 Supporters!

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Environmental Support Center

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SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

Sometimes success is measured by how well an organization bounces back from an internal crisis. In this issue, the spotlight is on the Northern Plains Resource Council in Billings, Montana. NPRC helps community leaders and affiliate organizations protect Montana's water and land through statewide campaigns and legislative work. Teresa Erickson, Northern Plains' Staff Director, spoke with us about how NPRC bounced back from an embezzlement, reminding us that "it's the recovery that counts."

What was the hardest part of the experience for Northern Plains?

The first feeling of pain, which felt like getting kicked in the stomach, came from realizing that we had been so deeply betrayed by someone on our staff for whom we had taken such pains to protect and ensure she was doing well. Nearly everyone cried when we broke the news to them.

Perhaps, though, the most difficult part of this experience was feeling the peril the organization was in. If we had not rallied with everything in us, this wonderful 35-year-old institution could have been in serious trouble. The weight of knowing we had made mistakes in not having good enough internal controls, and that the price for that mistake was so severe, was horrendous. As the Staff Director, the buck stopped with me. I made over 60 phone calls in the first week to inform board members, funders, and key allies.

What was the best part of the experience?

Seeing that 35 years of grassroots organizing and leadership development had built an organization so strong that we could survive and even thrive after a terrible experience such as this embezzlement. Members and staff rallied to understand what happened, prevent it from happening again and to determine a plan to get us through it. The overarching philosophy of the organizational response to this crisis was to seek a solution instead of being focused on retaliation. That positive approach was key to developing a recovery plan.

What are you doing differently now as a result?

Northern Plains now has a very good set of internal controls that are strictly adhered to and verified on a regular basis. We have shared these controls with virtually anyone who has asked for them because we would love to prevent another organization from going through what we did. These controls have been vetted through several experts on fraud and embezzlement prevention.

Our leadership is also very involved in the finances of the organization. This experience helped them understand the true depth of commitment required from a board member and they take it very seriously.

What is the first thing you'd tell another organization to do in reaction to a major crisis?

First, try and fully understand what happened and the full scope of implications to the organization.

Second, gather the most trusted solution-oriented people in the organization and write a recovery plan complete with long-term goals, objectives, specific steps, assignments and time frames. The recovery plan must include changes that will be implemented immediately to prevent this sort of crisis from happening again. If you can, limit the recovery team to a small group of people so that the rest of the organization's program can continue without interruption, if at all possible.

Third, in the kind of crisis we experienced, you must tell your staff, leaders and members as quickly as possible so that they don't read it for the first time in the press. We were told countless times that we were truly an honorable organization that valued its membership by telling them the truth. I believe this step solidified our base and made them even more protective and loyal.

Remember that in showbiz, it's not the mistake, it's the recovery that counts. People will forgive and forget and move on. Things like this happen all the time to all kinds of people and organizations and while those words don't ease the pain, they can inspire you to know that you'll get through it. Resolve to be stronger because of it.

What would you recommend to others so this doesn't happen to them?

- Institute good internal controls and train your staff and leaders about why they are important and how to use them. Take them seriously--they can prevent you a boatload of pain.
- Know who you are hiring. For the staff that would handle the finances, do a background check. If a staff person isn't willing to sign an agreement allowing you to do this, then I don't think you should trust them with your finances.
- Ensure that your leadership is involved in all aspects of the finances of the organization. This experience taught us first-hand that not only is it helpful to have board members involved, in the eyes of the law, the board is fiscally responsible for the organization.
- Learn the skill of developing a campaign plan. Coming up with a recovery plan came naturally to us because that is how we approach virtually all problem solving and strategy development. It's a great skill set to have and one that serves us daily.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

We are sad to announce that Caroline Brown, the Leadership and Enhanced Assistance Program Manager, has left ESC after six fruitful years. She took a good program and restructured it into an even more valuable resource for grassroots environmental justice and environmental activist groups. She has taken her organizational development expertise to the private sector to assist government agencies and businesses in meeting their capacity building needs.

We congratulate one of our board members, Richard Moore of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice in Albuquerque, on being one of the 2005 winners of the Leadership for a Changing World awards from the Ford Foundation. This award is for leaders taking on major social, economic and environmental challenges. Each of the 17 awardees receives \$100,000 for their work with an additional \$15,000 for strengthening individual or organizational effectiveness.

Our “Friends of the Environmental Support Center” Campaign, which began last year during our 15th Anniversary and will last through 2006, has gotten off to a great start. We had celebrations in Seattle, San Francisco, Chattanooga and here in Washington, DC. As a result, we raised almost four times as much from individual donors in 2005 as we did in 2004. We still need your help so that we can continue to build power at the grassroots. Please use the enclosed envelope or go to www/envc.org and click on “Donate Now” to support the campaign.

Celebrating 15 Years!

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