

Converting Good Intentions into Results

Rob Sayre
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A camping weekend in summer 1994 with other Blessed Families has grown and evolved for almost a quarter of a century.

Known first as the Pennsylvania Family Camp, Shehaqua Ministries is now known as "Shehaqua," denoting specific activities, an organization, with a brand and specific worldview about education and community.

This article is about the early years, the evolution from a small startup to a more mature organization that has passed on leadership to a new generation, and how we found solutions to financial and

organizational challenges while keeping our core values intact.

Certain comments are my personal reflections, others are the story of the development of the organization, and still others are lessons we applied from a book I repeatedly read for the first ten years, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization: Principles and Practices* (1990) by Peter F. Drucker. I hope others can learn from our success, failures and endurance.



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How We Began

The first two years, 1995-97, were three-day camping outings, with each family in their own tent, cooking for themselves, but we organized Divine Principle (DP) education, sports and crafts by age groups. We stayed at two different campgrounds in 1995-96. In 1997, we rented a large, old farmhouse for a separate program for the older kids and families stayed in their tents.

Our goals from the beginning have been to provide age appropriate DP education for the entire family; to facilitate a personal or "skin touch" experience with God for every participant; and to demonstrate what a community of faith looked and felt like.

This quote from Rev. Sun Myung Moon reflects some of the guiding theology that rooted our thinking and programs:

"How should you raise your children? You should raise them like God, to have beauty and excellence, as God did when He created Adam and Eve. This is the standard of education. . . . Then, what is God's love? If you analyze it, it is manifested through parental love, conjugal love, and filial love. There is nothing more. There are only those three kinds of love. This is why children love their parents, husbands and wives become one, and parents love their children. The three generations must be one."

Prayer Brings Answers

With 52 participants in 1997, we could no longer fit in the farmhouse and began searching for another location. In my prayer and reflections, the first answer given to me was, "You need to stop complaining and put that energy into problem solving." I had the sense also that behind that kind of sad voice was a more direct rebuke to me, something like, "Listen buddy, there are wars, human suffering beyond your comprehension, and you are complaining about some issues that honestly, you can solve."

In trying to not complain, answers did begin to come. My wife was a Girl Scout leader and had camped with them at a camp in Hickory Run State Park. The facility was huge and wonderful, but it had certain limitations we had to overcome. While it had a large kitchen, the park provided no kitchen equipment; same for the bathrooms. The 50-some cabins on the property were adequate, but most had no lighting, nor mattresses to sleep on. We had little to no money and only a vague sense of what we might do next, and no money for staff. What to do?

My next answer was, "Everything you need is already in place. You just need to think differently and see it." Yeah, well, it was not obvious to me at all. I needed money, people and a lot of help, resources I did not have. It dawned on me at one point that people were the answer. God was right! It was up to me to create programs that people would value and pay for. I had to compete for their time, talent and treasure.

Our first year at Shehaqua was inspiring, exhausting and insightful. We had 98 kids and 23 staff (adults) to run the entire program. We decided early on that we would 1) announce early and not change our plans, and 2) be inexpensive. We had so many profound experiences and the kids did as well. But we did not have near enough staff and did not want to start adding paid positions that would only make the programs more expensive.

We also hosted a God's Day workshop that winter which was very difficult. Some parents had sent their kids, who *really* did not want to be there, had little understanding of the DP, nor a family that prayed together and led a spiritual life. What to do? The answer was, the family is the key, we would make our programs family-centered and staffed. Our programs would require at least one parent to come with the kids.



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This fundamental policy change we made to require at least one family member to attend with their children and for everyone to have a volunteer role along with paying a fee were transformative for our programs and the participants. The quote from Drucker below reinforced this:

"The Non-Profit organization is not merely delivering a service, it seeks to make the user or recipient of their service into a doer. It seeks to create habits, vision, commitment and knowledge. Defining success in the non-profit means it must be

more than a supplier, it needs to create people who are actors for their mission. Until it has done so, it only has good intentions, not results."

This made everyone owners in a very real sense. In 1999, our program debuted as a Family Camp, attendance skyrocketed, but so did our staffing and money.

What Do Non-Profits Need?

We held planning meetings in the spring and began to build real programs and teams to own them and make them work. We had a plan, marketing, people, and money. We headed into 2000 with a great deal of enthusiasm, when we were thrown a huge curve ball. To use the facilities in Hickory Run State Park, we had to apply each year. In 2000, still being a new user, there were no dates available for us. What to do?

We had learned that the State of Pennsylvania had four other Group Camps with very similar facilities. We could have given up at this point, but did not. Instead, we applied to one immediately in western Pennsylvania and were accepted. We were relieved, but this was five hours away and we had to transport all our equipment, find new vendors to buy food from, and many other details that had to be worked out. Our attendance was stellar and we had small miracles happen along the way. This experience brought a new level of unity.

A Plan and the Mission

In applying Drucker's wisdom to our own programs and goals, we had a powerful set of tools.

"The real test of a mission statement is not how well it is written, but it must also be operational; its ultimate test is right action. There are three 'musts' of a good mission:

- Look at strength and performance
- Look outside for needs and opportunities
- Look at and focus on what you really believe in

The mission defines your priorities; your strategies are like bulldozers, they get things done."

In trying to apply the lesson above we held our first real strategic planning meeting in 2001. We gathered 30+ people, including our kids, to plan our future. We determined that we would 1) hold more weeks of family camp as we were completely full; and, 2) hold programs throughout the year: Spring, Fall and Winter weekends. By this time, we had a lot of money flowing through our bank account and decided to form our own nonprofit, incorporated in Pennsylvania, Pocono Family Ministries. This included our local Family Church, our Camp programs, and a few other outdoor-oriented programs.

From 2002-07 our programs grew and expanded. We were holding three weeks of Family Camp, a Spring gathering, a Fall Festival, and a Winter Retreat. My wife and I retired in 2008 as executive leaders, but remain involved in various capacities.

The Role of the Non-Profit Leader

"The mission of the non-profit executive is to convert the organization's mission into specifics, into actionable plans and strategies."

As the Drucker quote above indicates, the leaders of a non-profit have to convert its mission and values into programs that people value, processes that are clear, and add value and job descriptions that allow people to connect and contribute in ways that help the whole purpose, but also nurture the individual.



Managing for Performance and Take-Aways

Drucker observes:

"Non-profits can often fall into the trap that they become inward looking. Their commitment to their cause can morph into seeing the organization as an end in itself."

Here are my applied lessons:

Do build your organization around information and communication, not hierarchy.

Do use SMART goals, and make them:

Specific

Measurable

Actionable

Relevant

Time-limited.

Do ask yourself about your decisions: do they advance our mission or not?

Do require all of your programs to have a champion, a plan, and insist that part of this plan is how it will pay for itself.

On Volunteers: Since we have heavily relied upon volunteers, we discovered that providing clear roles and written job descriptions helped people find a place to serve, fit in and make their offering.

On Programs: In leading a program, we realized early on that having a set schedule with some flexibility worked best. People want to know what to expect. In this sense, it was like conducting an orchestra each year, with the same musical score, but different people in the orchestra.

On Change: After every program, we instituted a debriefing process where we could get candid feedback on what worked and what did not. There were no recriminations, nor blaming allowed, just learning. This is really the core of what separates an organization that learns, grows and develops from others that do not.

On Continuity: Another dilemma we faced was balancing continuity and traditions with change and innovation. Amy Cuhel-Schuckers introduced this concept to us at a planning meeting. We were wrestling with how to keep some of our traditions that were introduced by one generation and to add innovation brought by the next. The image she presented was that of a river. It is the same river in one sense, but the water running through it every moment is different and even the banks and sometimes even the course can change dramatically over time, but it is still the same river.

Conclusion

I believe all nonprofits face similar challenges of converting their ideals into programs and organizations with measurable results. The mission that Father Moon took on from Jesus to establish the True Parents

along with Mother Moon and to, what I coin as "planting flags" of the Divine Principle, their thought and the blessing into every corner of the world and in every aspect of society, is breathtaking. I believe the organizations that sprang up from these "flags," whether you see them through the lens of a religion, a movement or something else, should look to thought leaders such as Drucker for insight into how to accomplish their organizational goals.

Rob Sayre met the Unification movement in 1973, was blessed in the 1982 Madison Square Garden Blessing of 2,075 couples, and has three children and five grandchildren. He helped start Paragon House Publishers as its first CFO and then worked at Rodale Press, publishers of Men's Health and Prevention magazines, as business manager for its \$260 million book publishing division. He and his wife, Sally West Sayre, are one of the founding couples of the Shehaqua Ministries in Pennsylvania, an independent ministry still thriving after 24 years.

Photos above taken over the years at Shehaqua family camp in Pennsylvania