

Ten and Grateful

This month, a *goodman* celebrates its 10th anniversary. The company may bear my name, but it requires hard work from a lot of good men and women to bring

you all the workshops, online classes, publications and other services

Dear Reader: we provide. So, as our company embarks on its second decade, I offer my heartfelt thanks to:

My team: **Terrence McNally, Colin Rowan, Lori Matsumoto** and **John Whisler**. Forgive the cliché, but I couldn't do it without you.

Chris Hershey and everyone at Hershey/Cause, my partner in publishing *Why Bad Ads Happen to Good Causes* and *Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes*.

Corky Retson for your first-rate design work on this newsletter, month in and month out.

Patrick Coffin, Tom Colgan, and the castaways at Island Technologies who make sure our website provides the same high level of service we try to deliver in person.

Grady McNutt and **Evelyn Silverman** for making sure the numbers add up. (Everyone knows I'm not a numbers guy. I'm glad Grady is.)

Environmental Defense Fund, RealNetworks, and the **Environmental Media Association**, my first three clients. Special thanks to **Fred Krupp** for his steadfast support in the early years.

Al Gore and everyone at The Climate Project for the chance to participate in an historic effort to spread the word about global warming.

Kristen Grimm, Gwyn Hicks, Holly Minch and everyone at Spitfire Strategies for the opportunity to work with some of the smartest communicators in the public interest world.

Marc Freedman, John Gomperts, Stefanie Weiss, Bruce Trachtenberg, David Morse, Charlie Hess, Chris DeCardy, Eric Brown, Vince Stehle, Polly Seitz, Debbi Dunn Solomon, Brett Jenks, Raphael Bemporad, Vicki Rosenberg, Steve Stockman, Steve Bornstein, Daniel Silverman, and all the friends and colleagues I regularly turn to for advice and counsel.

Rob Moore, Beth Drews, and their colleagues at Lipman Hearne, another bunch of brilliant communicators whose belief in me and this company is already shaping the next ten years. (More on that this summer.)

And thank you most of all to **Carolyn, Dan** and **Olivia** – my home team – whose love and support make everything else possible. I am *always* grateful for you. Now, on to the next ten years! ■

Free-range thinking™ is a monthly newsletter for public interest groups, foundations, and progressive businesses that want to reach more people more effectively. For a free subscription, send your request to: andy@agoodmanonline.com or call 323.464.3956. Back issues are available on the web at www.agoodmanonline.com.

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What's Your Moment?

If explaining what your organization does leaves you tongue-tied, taking some time to answer this question may help you find a better way to say it.

A man stands alongside his car by the side of the road, clutching his BlackBerry like a security blanket while he talks to the camera. "This is my company's moment," he says, explaining that he's just used his mobile phone to fulfill a customer's order while parked in the middle of nowhere. The television commercial is part of a new campaign by AT&T called "Seize Your Moment," and while the ads are targeted at small business owners, the message has import for nonprofits, too.

In ten years of working with good causes, I have frequently encountered organizations that do excellent work but still struggle to describe that work concisely. Ask them what they do, and you'll be borne away on a sea of jargon to a happier place where capacity is built, access is widened, and the down-trodden are empowered. What the organization actually *does*, however, remains a mystery.

So, when I find myself in these conversations, I will ask another question: What's your moment? Or put another way, when do you know for sure that *this* is what you came here to do? When I put that question to staff at the environmental nonprofit LightHawk, they found the words they had been looking for.



a goodman

GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

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► There are some environmental problems that cannot be fully grasped at ground level. An oil spill stretching for miles, a mountainside denuded of trees by a clearcut, and urban sprawl do not really register in the brain until viewed from a few thousand feet in the air. Only from that elevation are the scope and impact of the problem completely evident. This is the premise that led to the creation of LightHawk in the late 1970s.

Founded by Michael Stewartt, a professional pilot, LightHawk uses small planes to give decision makers – government, business and community leaders – that perspective-shifting view from above. Given such an uncomplicated modus operandi, you would think LightHawk's staff would have no problem describing their work, but that was not the case when I heard from them in December 1999.

At that time, the board of directors had just hired its third executive director in four years, and LightHawk was undergoing yet another internal reorganization. Each ED had a different way of positioning the organization's work, and these varying interpretations had filtered down to the staff. When I conducted a series of interviews to learn how current employees talked about LightHawk, I was reminded of the tale about blind men describing an elephant. Each person had a different perspective and, consequently, described a different kind of animal.

Some staff members said LightHawk was primarily an *educator*, and that this essentially neutral position was critical to the group's success. It allowed

passengers to board the group's planes without fearing they were in the hands of a wild-eyed bunch of environmental crazies. In covering LightHawk, *The Washington State Herald* picked up on this theme, writing that the group's airplanes "could be a mediation platform and a place to find common ground and set aside issues."

For other staff, however, education did not go far enough: LightHawk, they told me, was a staunch *advocate* for environmental preservation and protection. Neutrality may be an appealing characteristic when attempting to lure passengers to the planes, they conceded, but when you need to attract donors, examples of aggressive advocacy make a more appealing pitch. The organization's press archives were filled with clippings from *The New York Times*, *National Geographic* and other outlets that portrayed LightHawk as an agent of change.

Education and advocacy are not mutually exclusive, of course, but there was a tension within the organization over which was LightHawk's primary role – and this wasn't the only source of tension. Staff members could also not agree on whether LightHawk was a *campaign leader* or a *service provider* for other environmental organizations. Most flights were commissioned by other groups – an argument for the service provider role – but LightHawk did not always wait for someone else to take the initiative. And even when it did partner with other groups, some staff members asked why LightHawk couldn't claim a shared leadership role?

These tensions led to a communications stalemate where nobody was wrong when it came to describing LightHawk, but nobody was on message either. Several different taglines, including "Unleash the Power of Flight," "The Wings of Conservation," "The Environmental Air Force," "Flying for the Future," and "Now You Can See the Big Picture," were in use at the same time on institutional communications. Ironically, an organization dedicated to giving people a clear picture was obscuring its own message behind a fog of slogans.

So I asked the question that often helps nonprofits cut through this kind of fog: What is your moment? Put aside all the fancy language about mission and goals and theories of change, and pretend that you can freeze the action at a particular moment – a moment that is unique to your work. *What happens in that moment?* Faced with this question, the staff at LightHawk began to speak with one voice.

LightHawk's moment, they said, occurs in the planes. It's that instant when the passenger looks out the window from a few thousand feet up, sees the problem in all its dimensions for the first time, and experiences a genuine conversion. "It's a profound experience," the director of operations told me. "No matter how many articles you read," a program coordinator added, "it's a whole 'nother thing to see it." When I reviewed LightHawk's press clippings, I saw that the media had identified this theme as well. "The experience of flying over panoramic wilderness areas and

ancient temperate forests frequently results in 'conversion experiences' for the previously unconvinced," wrote *Country Living* magazine.

By helping LightHawk identify its moment, I was able to propose a new tagline that speaks to the heart of their work: "Change is in the air." The organization featured it on the cover of their 2002 annual report (shown here) and continues to use it today, most prominently on its website (www.lighthawk.org). More importantly, I have used this question with several other clients and found that it often guides them towards greater clarity in their communications.

Which brings us back to where we started: What's *your* moment? ■

