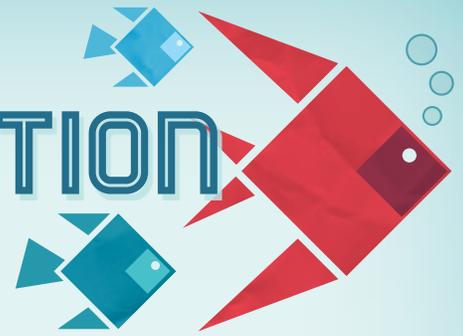


DRIVING PARTICIPATION

with Beth Brodovsky



SESSION 037

REBRANDING STARTS WITH UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNITY WITH AMANDA KAISER

Beth: Hello and welcome to Driving Participation. This is Beth Brodovsky, and I am here today with Amanda Kaiser. She's the Chief Pathfinder of Kaiser Insights and she's here today to talk to us about branding. Thank you for joining us, Amanda.

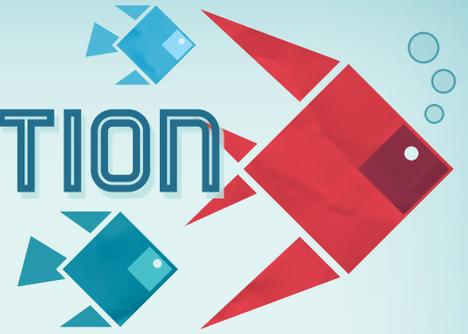
Amanda: Thank you, Beth. I'm really glad to be here.

Beth: We were lucky enough to be introduced by a mutual friend and it was an incredibly fortuitous connection. I love your insights and I am so excited to be able to share your specialty with the nonprofit community. Why don't you start by talking a little bit about how you wandered into this world because you have a great story.

Amanda: Thank you. I love that you say that word 'wander' because I hear people talk about that with their careers. Some people talk about this wandering or a journey or taking a squiggled path and I feel like that is my experience as well. Just to back up a little bit. I had the very good fortune to work for Crayola for the first half of my career. That's right, Crayola the crayon people. The greatest thing about working for Crayola is they're considerably consumer-centric. Everything is about the consumer and I learned that mindset in marketing very early on, that to be consumer-centric or donor-centric or customer-centric or member-centric in everything we do and that's fundamentally a really important thing in marketing. The other thing that Crayola afforded me is a ton of diversity so while I was there I got to work on product development and brand strategy and sales and customer service and advertising and market research, the whole nine yards, which I think has been really, really important as I've been building up my market research firm to have that background in marketing. After Crayola, I eventually landed at the National Association of Colleges and Employers leading their marketing effort and when I came to them, one of the very first questions I had was "who are our members" and data and surveys got me that. I was able to build a member profile and I understood who they were, but after I did that, I started asking questions like "why are they our members" and "what value do they get from the Association" and "what problems do

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they have that we can solve” and to answer those questions, I knew that I needed qualitative research, but qualitative research can be more expensive and time consuming than surveys. We didn’t have the budget. I considered for awhile doing it myself and to be honest with you, I really resisted that for awhile because it was time consuming and member interviews wasn’t something I did. The research agencies do that work and in the end, I got myself trained and it took maybe one interview before I saw the huge potential for our organization. I think it took about fifty more interviews to get the knack of the whole thing and now that’s what I do full time. I conduct interviews.

Beth: That’s why you’re such a perfect person to be on here. A lot of people say something like you have to do something for 10,000 hours to really be an expert at it. I’m sure you’ve put quite a few hours in yourself and it’s such a great opportunity for other people who may be have never really picked up the phone or written a survey or done any of these things directly to learn about - what have you learned from all of these many, many interviews that you’ve done?

Amanda: I love that 10,000 hour analogy. In fact, I wonder if it first started with Malcolm Gladwill and his book “Outliers.”

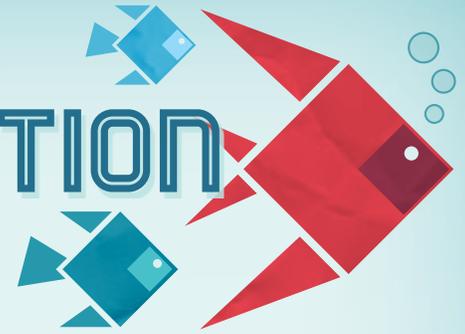
Beth: I think that is where that came from.

Amanda: Right, I just finished that book so this is perfect timing and it’s a fabulous book by the way. I agree with his hard work and the 10,000 hour thing. I’ve learned when I do my interviews, I’ve learned how to conduct them better. I’ve learned how to put people at ease and I’ve learned how to get them to talk about things that maybe make them uncomfortable, but really help inform the work that we’re doing and I’ve learned how to get far better answers and I think anybody can do this work. They can talk to their customers, donors, members. Anybody can do that, but it does take you a pretty long time before, for me it took a very long time before I was doing it really well.

Beth: You can get all kinds of great insight out of this. It’s funny because you do a lot of what you call member research and I use the term “membership” a lot, too, and to me, really all that means are the people you have managed to attract to your organization that you want to

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keep engaged and involved and participating. Is that how you look at it?

Amanda: Yeah, exactly. The style of research that I do transfers to a lot of different things. When I first started this company, I was focused more on B to B so customer research, but yes. The same style of research works for members, it works for donors, it works for readers, it works for people who are in your online community, whoever your audience is. I tend to almost not want to use audience. I think maybe community is a better word for something like that.

Beth: I think you're right. Sometimes you write audiences and what it is and audience is sometimes an external feeling about it and it also has a bit of a, I hate to say it, for profit feel about it. I feel the same way about the word member. It's not the right word, but if anybody out there knows a better word that seems to sum up this sense of the community that you've gathered, I'm looking for that word.

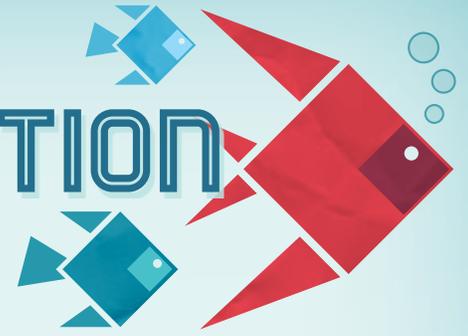
Amanda: I agree and "communities" are a great word. "Audience" has this feeling of people we're talking at. "Community" is people we're involved with.

Beth: Right, exactly. Why is starting with this type of community research the most effective way to begin something like a re-branding campaign or a member marketing campaign? Before you start something where you're saying 'this is who we are and we want to tell you that', why do you believe that this type of research is so powerful as a place to begin?

Amanda: I keep hearing this idea that your brand, your marketing, people's opinions of you certainly live in your communities heart's and minds and if you want to mirror that image, if you want to amplify that message, you've got to know what it is. I keep kind of going back to when I started in marketing ten years ago, we could be really casual. As long as our brand looked good, as long as we got the message out there, people would come, but it's not that way anymore. Now every single one of us has to fight for attention and I think about my world, where I came from with Crayola and other big brands like that. They just dump millions of dollars in advertising and promotions to do this, but most of us can't do that and that presents a dilemma. If you don't have the money, how do you get heard? The only way you can get heard is by telling the story your community needs to hear and you need to solve

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their unique problems and I think the only way that you can really do that is to understand their point of view, their opinions, their challenges, their goals, their problems and you can get all of that from this kind of research.

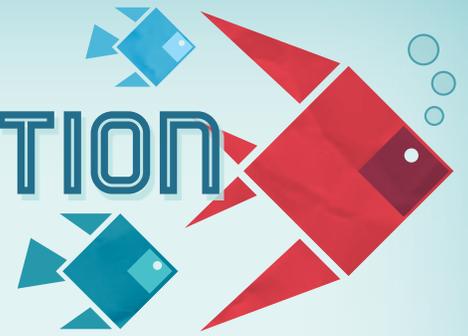
Beth: Why do you think doing it as a one to one interview approach is the best way to understand these questions of why? Like you mentioned when you first talked about yourself. I love the concept of why. One of my favorite books is Simon Sinek's book "Start With Why" and I think it's something every nonprofit should read about how to make sure that you're connected with the purpose or the reason behind what you're doing. Many nonprofits really are connected to the parts of what they do, but sometimes communicating that gets lost in the effort to community of the what of what they do.

Amanda: Yeah, yeah. I'm familiar with Simon's work as well. It's really good stuff. There's a couple of different issues that play here. One of the things that I'd like to kind of ground us in is this idea that when most of us talk about research, we think it synonymously with surveys. The survey is a methodology. It's easy and cheap, but it's really limited and I think most of us don't realize how incredibly limited it is. What surveys can do is they can tell us about demographics. They can tell us how to reach people, what social media channels they're on. If you do a survey right and do it over many years, it can also gauge a certain amount of satisfaction, but I think most organizations are asking bigger questions than that. What they're asking is how do we grow or how do we position ourselves for the future or how do we tell that story that people want to hear and surveys can't answer those questions. Phone interviews can answer those questions and this interview methodology answers those why type questions. It answers why are they donating? Why are they volunteering? Joining? Purchasing? Attending? It answers what value do we offer and why. Why do they think we offer that value? What's behind that for them? It answers what problem does our community have and why. Why is that a problem for them? How did that problem come to be? How do they feel about that problem? The why, a lot of those 'why' questions and that conversational technique, that is what you need strategy, innovation and your marketing.

Beth: Absolutely and I know people will kill me if I don't ask what specific questions. There's different types of research approaches. In your approach, what kind of questions do you ask that help you get to why? How do you handle a follow up question? How do you make it a

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research method so that there's comparison and everybody gets asked the same thing, while still making sure while you're on the phone with this person, there's this tangent that they want to go on. How much room do you give people?

Amanda: Yeah, that's interesting. A lot of room actually. I tend to write these very conversational scripts that are only ten to twelve questions and one of my favorite, two of my favorite questions - one is what are you most challenged by? In your professional life, what are you most challenged by? That's a really good question because that starts to uncover their problems. The other question is if we handed over the reins of the organization to you today and made you CEO, what would you work on first? This answers the same question because what they do is they now start to say "I'm going to change the organization to solve my problem" so it's answering that problem question in both ways. Those are my favorite questions, but actually those questions are actually not that important. It just sets the stage because what happens is people talk. They'll do a couple of things. They'll talk about something that I've heard about before and when I've heard about something a number of times, I know it's a hot question and I notice that they're asking follow up questions or they'll give a throw away and then they'll say "but that's a story for another time" or "I shouldn't talk about that. Let me answer your question." They'll interrupt themselves and talk about something else and I always go back to those because there's usually some really great insight that comes out of that. The next trick is when you know it's time to follow up is asking the question in a very objective way so you're not leading them. When I first started out, I tend to want to put my own feeling about it in my question back to them and I've learned to not do that so what I'll say is "hey, you said something earlier that was really interesting. This is what I heard you say. Can you elaborate?" That is the perfect kind of follow up sort of question.

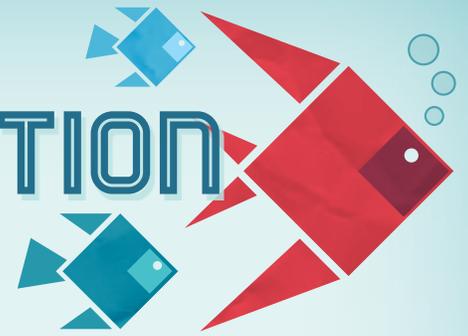
Beth: As opposed to what?

Amanda: As opposed to saying, a leading example would be "that sounds really bad. Can you tell me more about that?" because you've already set the stage for 'that's really bad'.

Beth: That's really interesting because I think normally if you're on the phone with somebody, I think it's our nature to want to connect with or feel like you're feeling it and thinking that's a way to make an emotional connection with somebody and be like "oh my gosh, that's awful.

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How did you get through that?" That would be, I feel like that would be my nature to want to put it that way.

Amanda: It is and I think that's why it took me fifty interviews to drum that out of me.

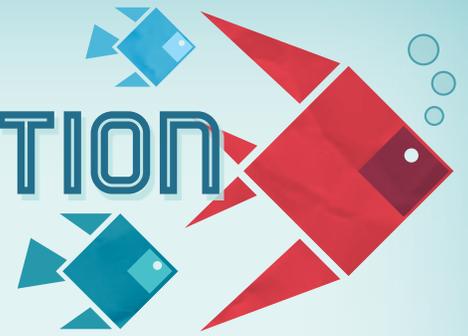
Beth: Let's follow up on that. What are the biggest mistakes that people who are doing this on their own, because not everybody thinks to contact somebody like you, an outside resource that could do these calls for them. They think "I really know these people and they're only going to want to talk to me." What are some of the biggest mistakes people make when they do this on their own and how can we help? Some people we know with a budget constraint need to do it on their own. What mistakes are they making that we can help them avoid?

Amanda: Sure, yeah. If you're going to do it on your own, I think one of the things that people tend to do is they reach out to friends so they stack the deck in terms of they'll reach out to people who are members or who are people they know, people they know in the community. You start talking to a very specific set, not necessarily a random sample from a particular segment. That can be a problem. If you reach out to only the people you know who you know are going to answer, it's a bit of a problem. What you want to do is you want to try to recruit from a larger group and you actually want to steer away from friends. The other problem that people have that I had is because I was part of the staff, I had to work double time to assure them that I was not emotionally invested in what they said, even though I was because what happens is if they get the whiff of me feeling bad about something they said, they'll tamp down everything else that they say and so respondents are very influenced by not wanting to hurt your feelings and that becomes a bit of a problem so you have to try to reassure them in what you say and what you do that anything they say is fine.

Beth: Right, that is a really, really good point. Is there any point in not in a specific conversation, but in the choice of how to handle or conduct this type of research that you would say "you know what organization? If you try and do this yourself, you're not going to get what you want" or are there specific problems that people are trying to solve or specific issues that are going on, like they've got a hostile membership or something. Is there any situation where you would say "you know what? If you try to do this on your own, you're not going to get what you want"?

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Amanda: I think it's more of itf you do it yourself, there's a learning curve. Your first bunch of interviews may not yield you as rich data as you need to answer some of the problems that you have.

Beth: How do you know? How do you know if it's not rich enough data to answer the question? You're going to get some answers, so how do you know if that's not really the answer?

Amanda: You know, one of the the things that really led me to making this huge distinction between surveys and qualitative research was when I just kept having more questions. It was easy for me as an Association professional to just conduct survey after survey after survey and it was never satisfying. I kept trying to use that methodology to answer these bigger questions and it just wasn't doing it and I would get the answers from a survey and it just spawned more questions. Maybe that's the trigger, that when you do something and you keep saying "I wish I had asked that because now I've got a bigger question and I'm just not feeling sure of where to go next because I still have thirty more questions." That's probably the trigger that says "we're using the wrong methodology or we're not diving deep enough when we're talking to our community."

Beth: Do you ever call the same people back if you feel like you have follow up or more questions?

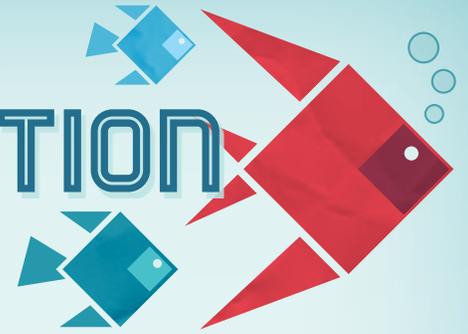
Amanda: I have. On behalf of clients I have gone back to people and said "hey you know what? You said something really interesting. Can I talk to you for five minutes more?" I have done that and that's okay. One of the things that's really important when you do this kind of research is to also offer your respondent anonymity and sometimes when you're doing that really well, it makes it a little bit tougher to track people back to their responses.

Beth: Right. In your experience and this may be relative to the actual organization, how many people do you fell you need to talk to and get answers from in order to feel like you do have the full spectrum or the range of input that you need to move forward and make decisions?

Amanda: Yeah, absolutely. So I work by segment. Many organizations have a couple, two

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three maybe even more segments that they're talking to and maybe they talk about it in terms of engaged or not engaged or they talk about it by title or demographic or something like that so within each segment that I interview, I strive to get twelve to fifteen complete interviews and these interviews are forty five minutes to an hour long. They're pretty long and it gives me a lot of data, but the reason I go to twelve to fifteen is I start seeing these patterns after six to eight interviews or so. I start seeing topics that come up over and over and over again so then the last half of the interview is whenever somebody brings up that topic I know to follow up. I know to get more detail. I know to start building up the story and understanding the context behind what's going on there.

Beth: Right. Say you have twenty interviews planned and your sixth interview is in and people are starting to say things that you're like "didn't expect this, everyone saying this thing." Do you adjust your either the amount of time that you spend on the question or add in a question or change anything in your methodology in your question script to get more if you seem to be seeing that or does that muck up the works when it comes to the evenness of the process.

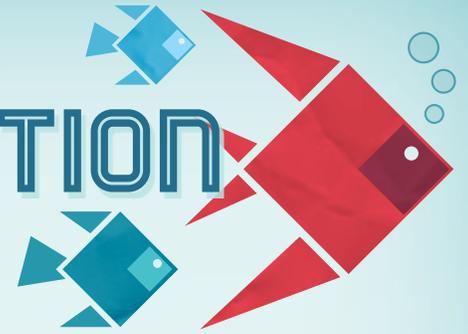
Amanda: It doesn't and that's the beauty of qualitative. I'm working on a really interesting piece of research right now for a national professional association. We actually did, I did the first nine interviews and we did kind of a mid-project update with me and the association and they look for everything that their members had said so far and they highlighted a couple of things that they really wanted to get more information on and I highlighted three things that I thought they needed to get more information on and I did, I adjusted the script and I took some questions out and added in some questions and I think we're going to get them a much better result since we did that.

Beth: That's awesome. How do you get people to agree to doing a forty five minute to an hour interview?

Amanda: Yeah, it seems like so much time, but you're most engaged or your loyal or the people who love you the most want to do that. What I find is I get somewhere between a one in seven to a one in ten response rate so if I send out a list to one hundred fifty people, I'll get generally fifteen complete interviews at least and that's what I need. It's not everybody, but it's

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enough to get a really good view and it does seem like forty five minutes to an hour is a really long time, but most people are so happy to be asked about their opinion. The other thing that was surprising for me since I started this work so many years ago or the thing that was surprising to me quite often was people feel really good by the end of the interview. They're happy somebody is listening to them and they're happy that they got to share.

Beth: Really? So it's a little bit of an engagement strategy as well.

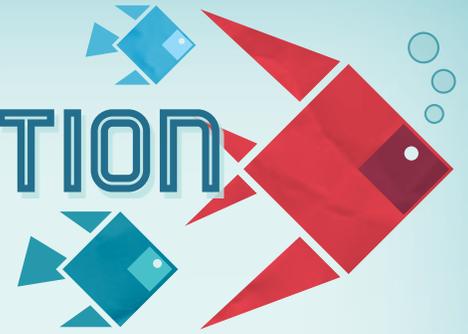
Amanda: Maybe yeah. It's nice. I can't think of any time when somebody hasn't gotten off the phone and said "thank you very much. That was really nice."

Beth: Let's talk a little bit now as you call them the haters because you can't just go out and do your twenty calls to people that you already know love you. Like you said, don't just ask your friends. I don't think you meant don't just ask your personal friends. I think you meant don't just ask the people who are friends of the organization. You have to get the opposite opinion and people who are close to the organization in addition to the people that are maybe the outliers and the people that signed up and don't show up and the people that complain all the time. What are your thoughts on like the different sort of verticals, the voices that need to be heard to get a full picture of things?

Amanda: Yeah. I think any methodology of research works well for your really engaged or your really loyal - and it works well for the medium engaged in loyal. Research does not work well for haters or for people who have already checked out because those folks have already written you off. Research also doesn't work usually well for people who are fairly unaware of you. These are folks who have no skin in the game and they don't want to take the time and what ends up happening is they'll lie and it's probably not in a malicious way. It's just in a "my time is precious and I don't value you enough to give you my time so I'm going to give you the minimal answer" and what that answer is going to be is I don't participate because there's no value for me. I think we can already predict what that answer is. It's going to be a very minimalistic answer of there is no value for me. For me, I think it's far better to talk to the people who love you the most and maybe talk to the people who medium love you because the people who love you the most are going to give you all of these insights that really inform

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how you plan your strategy, how you think about your marketing, how you write your story, how you go ahead and do innovation and new product development and if you're developing it with those folks in mind, your most loyal people in mind, then you're going to attract more people like them and the organization will keep getting stronger and stronger because you have more of the kind of people who love you the most.

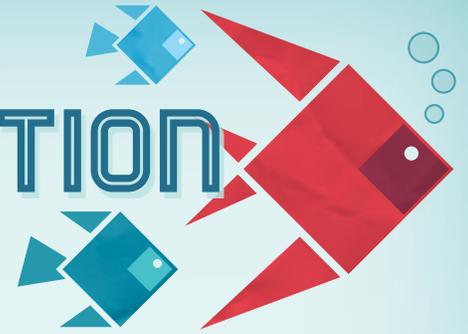
Beth: Absolutely. That brings up the point of in the scheme of things, we talk about the people that don't love you, we talked about people that do love you, but we haven't talked about interviewing or what research should be gathered if any from people if they don't know about you at all. One of the things that you and I were just talking about in our pre-chat was if you're trying to solve a problem, why aren't people joining our organization? Why aren't people coming in to what we were talking about was a school that is struggling with admission? Can you get everything that you need out of interviewing the people that are already in and already love your organization to tell you why they're there and what they want or do credible research to really find out the full picture do you need to do something like a random populated focus group or hire a tele-calling company to call all the people, your potential members or potential students or potential donors that aren't there and maybe don't know about you? Is there value to doing that or is it needed? What do you think?

Amanda: If I had to prioritize, I would rather spend my time working with the current loyalists to make sure that the story is as strong as it could be, that the value we're delivering is as good as it could be, making sure that all of that's great and when you're delivering amazing value throughout the entire organization, everywhere from your marketing to your customer service to your product to everything, then you'll see growth. I'm not sure that doing research with a larger population would necessarily help you because again I think what they'll come back to is "I haven't heard of it" or "there's just not value for me" and so then depending, either way, you have a communication issue or a product issue and you need to solve those and you can solve those by talking to your loyalists.

Beth: I completely agree because talking to people that maybe chose the school down the street instead of your school or decided they didn't need a professional association or whatever it is, they're not there for lots of reasons and it's a lot more time consuming and

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expensive to educate someone that they need something that they don't believe that they need versus if you look inside and identify the people within your organization who are happy to be there to participate, I call it your basic person profile and that's why you and I are talking about how this is such a valuable tool. A lot of times you'll think about doing member interviews in the beginning of - we're trying to get more members. We're trying to get more students. We're trying to get more and we want to bring more people in, but it's a great place to also begin any type of strategic conversation of wanting to improve whether it's branding or membership or getting ready to position like a capital campaign or something like that because if you can really identify who are the people that both give you everything that you need and get back everything that they need and really scope them out to really describing them so that they have a name and a face and a personality, then you can say "where else can I find people just like them." So much more of a straight line, especially for an organization that's not Crayola, that doesn't have lots of money to spend on stuff like this to get very directly to identifying who adores you and it's a mutually sustainable relationship. That's what I would think.

Amanda: Yeah, and I'm glad you articulated it that way. For us is when we think about growth, organization growth, we think about we don't serve this audience, let's add them in. We don't serve these people, let's add them in and so we tend to think the more the merrier and I don't think that's the case. The more of the people who love us the most the merrier, but not the more of everybody. When you start inviting everybody, then everything becomes generic and you just don't add as good of a value.

Beth: Absolutely. That's not just a message about who to choose for making a membership interview call. That is a core branding principle. You can either be an inch deep and a mile wide and you've got to chase really far to get all those people or you can be an inch wide and a mile deep and if you know exactly who you're targeting, they're easier to find. They practically identify themselves when you know exactly who you're looking for and who you're not looking for. When your answer to who you want in your organization, who you want as a member, who you want as a student is everyone or everyone who is potentially in the region or in the area or people capable of coming, your communications, your outreach, your message, your value to them is so generic that you end up not really being a great choice to

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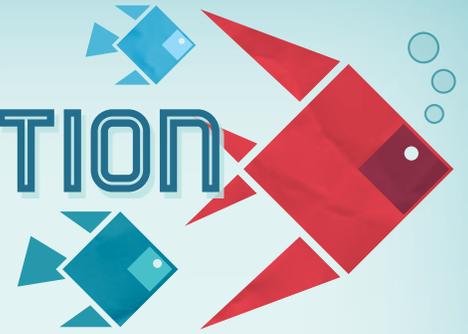


any one person. I would rather see people turn down and be really clear on who is not for them in order to make room for the people that are going to give them like 100% than have a whole bunch of people in your organization that are giving 30%. It is tough to do this for people. It's tough to find the time and the money and even expertise to do all of this stuff. I wanted to talk about how do people get started with doing this? What should they be doing if they have to make choices in order to learn more about this? If they're deciding how they're trying to gather insight and money is an issue and time is an issue and expertise is an issue, what would you say that they choose or lean on or where would they go to start something like this?

Amanda: That's a great question because getting insights and getting research is inherently intensive no matter what the methodology so maybe a different way to think about that question is to say "okay so how do you know when to make it a priority" and I think you don't necessarily need to be conducting research all the time, but when do you make it a priority? I think one of the times to make it a priority is when you're stuck. When you realize that the not knowing an answer to a question holds the organization back or maybe it's when you're thinking of making a massive change that will upend the whole organization and that's when you know that you need to add some time for research and you were just talking about this Beth where you said if you're going to start a branding project, if you're going to start a huge campaign, if you're going to start doing some of these big projects then you start with research. I think that's a great way to think about the priorities so we've gotten to this point where we know we're going to do this big project and we need the research, but we're still time constrained or money constrained and the problem is most of the time we do let time and money drive the methodology we choose. We assume we can get our questions answered with a survey because a survey is cheap and it's fast, but I think that's not the way to choose your methodology because certain methodologies are good for answering certain questions. What you should use to drive your methodology is your goals. If you have the goal to learn what social media channels our members are using, by all means, conduct a survey. If your goal is to find out what pages on your website are most trafficked, then you use your own data, but if your goal is to build a very dimensional, very compelling brand, then you want to use phone interviews.

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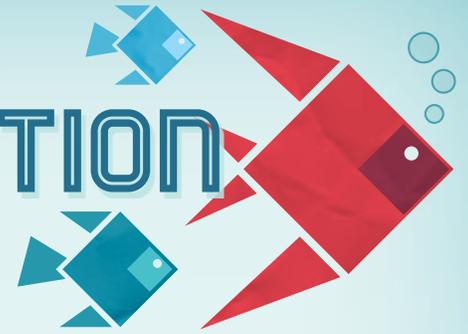
Beth: Those are great guidelines. I love that. One of the other things that we were talking about is sort of when do you know when to just move forward and when do you know when to pull back. We were talking about how when in an organization your problem is you're not getting enough members or you're not getting the right members or you're not attracting the students or whatever it is, I feel like I've been getting a ton of calls from organizations saying "all of our members are getting really, really old and they're retiring or they're not as involved and we need to start attracting new people, but we're not getting who we want or we're not getting enough of what we want" and how do you help us with that and I talk to them about things like going all the way back to this level and figuring out who your perfect person is, why they're involved and what they're getting out of it and what ends up happening a lot of the time is people go "yes, yeah, yeah, yeah. We agree with that, but we need new members now. We need to get the donors in right now" so people have the tendency to sort of want to jump forward into tactics and execution and doing a thing that's going to have that quick turn around that will give that massive hit to create a short term improvement versus saying we need to understand what the problem is. Have you seen that as well?

Amanda: I have. I have seen that and so what typically and when I've been in environments where that's happened where we rushed into tactics, what invariably happened is the outcome wasn't that good and so then we had to go back and regroup and try again and the outcome wasn't that good and in the long run, we spent far more time than if we had just taken the one month or two months time to do all of that discovery up front. I think in the long run, research gives you so much basis to make really good decisions even though it seems like a lot of time and it seems like a lot of money, it pays for itself in spades. The value you get from that is far more than the time and money you put into it.

Beth: It's so hard to feel that when you're getting pressured or you're bleeding students or members or donors. It's brutal because you want to change that, but I've seen so many people just throw money at mailers and new websites and creating new programs and then at the end of the year, none of it adds up to the sum of its parts because they've just done and done and done and tried this and tried this and tried this and anything that doesn't work, you feel worse and worse about it every single time and it's hard to not want to jump right in and take action, but I usually try to tell people if you're not getting what you want,

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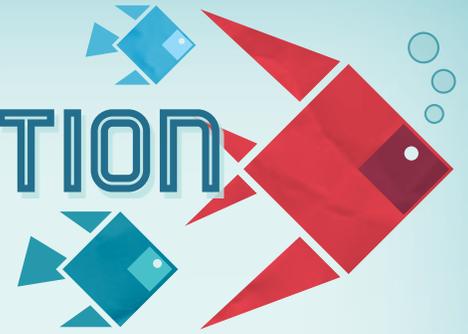
it's one of three things. Either people don't know you exist or know about you so you're not marketing enough. You're not communicating enough to broad enough people and sometimes that's just a pure budgetary thing like you don't have the budget. You've got it up, you're saying the right things, you've got it all going on, but you just can't paper the world enough with your message to get conversions that you're looking for. That can be one problem. Another problem can be that you've been putting it out there, but you're saying the wrong thing. Whatever it is that you're doing to attract people isn't the right message and member research can really, really help with that and then the third thing is people don't want what you have, which either means you have the wrong stuff, the wrong programs or they're not finding value in what you're doing or it's just sometimes it's big and there really is a big problem, and sometimes it's just little tweaks that you really could offer something slightly different or position it or communicate it a little differently so making sure that what you're creating and serving to people really is what people want so two out of the three things doing this project can help. I always hate for somebody to jump into the we're going to dump more money into sending out more messages without being really sure that it's not one of the other two problems.

Amanda: Yeah and the way we dealt with that at Crayola is everything was consumer informed so we did our market research and then we did our strategy and then we did our tactics and by and large that was the process that we took every single time. I think that's one of the things that we can learn from the big brands is that's their strategy. That's the way they work every process for every product and it doesn't mean that you have to have billions of dollars behind you to do that process as a solo entrepreneur. That's what I do now. I still keep to that process and I don't have billions of dollars for sure.

Beth: Right and I think it's really important because sometimes for profit companies and the way corporations do things is often looked down upon or they don't understand and they're so different than a nonprofit and in some ways that's true. The whole audience-centric versus the emotional you focus connection that we really try and preach and live all the time in the nonprofit communications world, corporations don't do that. That's something I always feel that the for profits might be able to learn from some of the nonprofits, but there's plenty of methodologies and processes that they have in place. They wouldn't have those millions and

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billions of dollars if some of these things that they're doing weren't working. I'm sure there's waste in every organization, the government not the least of that, but every organization has that, but there's a lot of things that I think we can learn and adopt and process and testing is one of them and to understand that you don't have to necessarily do that at their level and their budget to get some value out of it.

Amanda: Right.

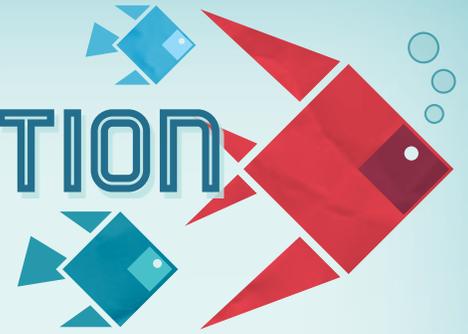
Beth: This has been terrific. I just want to kind of close off with the final question that if you were talking to an organization or if you were an organization and you wanted to get some of this, what would be the best thing that you could recommend for an organization to do to get started and getting some insights this way?

Amanda: I'd want them to think very carefully about what their problem is, what's going on, what are they trying to solve and then the next step in that question is what are your goals? If you think you want to conduct some kind of donor research or customer research or some kind of research like that, what are you hoping that it solves for you? Not the answer, so we definitely don't want to predict what the answer is going to be, but what we want to know is when you get the answer, how is that going to change your organization? That becomes a really great exercise for any organization to start taking even before somebody like me talks to them. They start thinking a lot about what are we trying to solve? What are our problems? How do we solve them? How do we grow? How do we change? How do we get better? What's keeping us from doing that? What do we need to know that will help us answer those questions? When we get that answer, what are we going to do with it? That's really important. When you're able to answer those kinds of questions, you're totally ready for a project like this.

Beth: I think that's perfect advice, especially because, I hate to say this, but it's actually a respect issue as well. If you're going to ask one of your members to donate an hour of their time to serve your organization, that's what they're doing, you should be only asking them things that you need to know, that you're going to take action on because those people that you interview, they're going to be looking. They're going to be watching to see what

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you do with the advice that they gave you and you want to demonstrate a respect of their time and you don't want to ask something that if there's another way that you can find that answer, that's what I always say. Really look at your question and say "could that question be answered through Google research? Could that question be answered - everybody has a database. Could you find the answer to that question in your database? You really call down your questions to kind of things you can only get the answers to by talking to people and that the questions you're going to ask them are your right, things that are going to have a transformative change on your organization if you - based on which way that it seems you should go.

Amanda: You bring up a really good point. Not just with this research, this research is particularly time consuming, but any time you invite somebody for a focus group or you invite them for their opinion or you send them a survey, the sort of untalked about deal is if I'm taking this survey, if I'm spending my time, if I'm giving you my insights, you're going to do something with that. Anytime that the organization doesn't act on what they've learned, it can hurt the trust between the respondent and the organization. You bring up a really good point. You've got to be ready and willing to say "okay, we're gong to make some changes based on what we hear."

Beth: Exactly so it's important to not do the research too far in advance of being ready to act on it because if you take these calls and do all this stuff and then sit on it, I always say sometimes it's worse than if you never called them at all.

Amanda: Right.

Beth: This has been fabulous. I'm sure people have learned a lot from it. I've learned some things, a few tips that I can put into some of my work. How can people get in touch with you if they'd like to learn more?

Amanda: Sure. I write a blog on Community Insights base marketing. I also write about strategy and innovation, but a lot on marketing and branding and customer service and all of the elements of marketing grounding in being member focused or donor focused or student focused for parent focused or whatever it is that you're thinking of and you can find my blog

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at smooththepath.net and I'm also very active on Twitter and I'm @smooththepath.

Beth: Terrific. Well, I will have all of the links to the books that we mentioned and direct connections to you being able to connect to Amanda directly on the show notes page so keep an eye out for that and thank you so much for your time.

Amanda: Great. Great talking to you Beth. Thank you.

Beth: All right.