

Partnership and its Impact on Fundraising

The Body of Christ working together to change the world leverages the effectiveness of money given through partnerships. The challenge of working together is pointing to shared success. Working with Kingdom minded people should be fun.

Introduction

Rob: Welcome to the podcast of "When Money Goes On Mission."

I'm here today with Brian O'Connell of [REACT Services](#), one of my oldest friends in this work.

I think we go back to, gosh what is it, 1984, 1985?

Brian: Yeah.

Rob: You still had peach fuzz. Gotten a little gray now. I've always been old.

Brian: Great to be here with you Robert, really is.

Rob: Yeah, great to be with you too, Brian.

And we're gonna be talking about partnering. And the funding of it, the participation in it, what we look for in it, and how this really helps the body of Christ come together to actually do the work of the gospel, of presenting the gospel around the world.

And it may sound like a dry topic. Often when we start talking about money and things like partnership it sounds a little dry, but I can tell you from my personal experience that this is by far some of the most exciting things that are going on in the body of Christ.

Which don't necessarily attract a lot of notice and that's really on purpose, isn't it, Brian?

Brian: It's by design, absolutely.



What Does REACT Services Do?

Rob: It's by design. So tell us a little bit about [REACT Services](#) and tell me a little bit about, tell us a little bit about how you got into this work.

Brian: Yeah, how much time do you have?

REACT Services is really designed as a partnering initiative to help the church.

We want to challenge the status quo of the church. Because we believe that the Jesus strategy is the body of Christ working together.

And everybody gives good lip service to it, "Yeah, we're all trying to do that," and nobody does it.

Or when they do it, they don't do it well and they give up a lot of times.

Rob: Well, just about every missions conference I've ever been to and in my work with [First Fruit](#) and prior foundations to that, I went to a lot of conferences.

Because that's where the body of Christ gathers and sort of, around certain issues and around...

There was always talk of partnership, and of working together, and the power of working together.

The African proverb, "If you wanna go fast, go by yourself. "If you wanna go long, go together."

Brian: That's right.

Rob: I heard that sermon, that exhortation, yet it really is very hard to do and that's where your work comes into play.



Three Rules to Work with Good People

Brian: Well, it's interesting about that African proverb, 'cause it is such an important concept.

Because there are times when we should go fast and we need to go fast to get things done as an individual organization.

But if we do want to go far, we've got to work together. And as we talk about two or three different African cultures where that proverb was present.

And then I started talking to my Russian friends and we said, "Oh yeah, that's a Russian proverb. Goes back centuries," you know. And I'm going, "Really, wow, interesting."

And then I'm working in China, my Chinese friends go, "All proverbs are Chinese." Right?

And so the idea is present in so many different cultures.

So we understand it intuitively. But the challenge is how do we get it and land the airplane, so to speak?

And our work as REACT, we talk a lot about specific context for our work. And my board and I have wrestled with, you know, who do we work with, how do we work with, you know, where do we work?

And so we came up with three rules, for our organization and for the people that we work with.

1. WORK WITH KINGDOM-MINDED PEOPLE

Brian: And the first rule is, we want to work with kingdom-minded people.

Not empire people. We have other words that we use for the empire-minded people, but the idea is we want to work with people that have a kingdom mindset.

And the idea that we see visually illustrate that is this is empire and this is kingdom.

Which relates so clearly to your book, right? The whole idea of a community of giving and receiving. How do you give?

Well, you have to give like this. How do you receive? You have to receive like this. If you're like this, you can't do either.

And so that first rule for us is, okay, we look for the kingdom-minded leaders, the kingdom-minded people.

They're already out there doing intuitively what God's called them to do in that arena.

2. WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE FUN

Brian: The second rule is kind of a counter-intuitive one. It's have fun or go home.

The kingdom of God is a party. It's a celebration. You read the gospels and Jesus, he was having fun with his friends. Having dinners, enjoying himself.

One of my favorite pictures of Jesus, if you've seen it before, is the laughing Jesus. 'Cause you always see Jesus as a serious, or you see him on a cross, obviously.

That's important pictures of who Jesus is and what he did. But I love to see the laughing Jesus.

'Cause that implies that there's a celebration going on in the kingdom. We're celebrating what God has done. What He's already done.

3. WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Brian: And then the third rule is we're trying to work together to change the world.

We believe that's the only way the world gets changed is by the body of Christ working together. By partnering together specifically to see the kingdom advanced and accelerated.



The Work of Mission is to Invite People to the Banquet Table

Rob: You know on your second point, [in the book](#), the story arc for the book for me starts when I was at the rescue mission as a young leader, sort of thrust into missions leadership without understanding much.

My mentor, Reverend Lewis Whitehead, who founded the mission. His favorite, and whenever he had a chance to preach, he always preached from this idea of inviting the least, the last, and the lost.

The people at the furthest extensions of life that were, and inviting them to the banquet table.

And so the story arc in the book, I end the book with the picture in Revelation 19 of the banquet of the Lamb when Jesus drinks of the wine again, which meant he drank of it before.

Brian: Yeah, that's right.

Rob: When he was with us and then he will drink it again when we are all together at the banquet.

And the work of mission is that and therefore, the work of REACT Services.

You know, in order to help people who may be thinking about getting involved in a partnership or maybe in a partnership, would you...

Take us through an example of one that you're working it, 'cause I know you through the Blue Med, through the Refugee Highway.

That's a very prescient issue today, of course, with the refugees throughout the world and the political reactions that we're seeing coming against those refugees.

I would imagine there's a lot of Christian organizations getting buffeted by all of this for their work in this and otherwise.

So you want to just tell us a little bit about one of the partnerships that you're working with?



What is the Refugee Highway Partnership?

Brian: Yeah. I think the [Refugee Highway Partnership](#) is an interesting model.

It's a very loosely structured organization and it's not an organization that's registered anywhere. It's a movement.

We're trying to promote the idea that **the church should be a welcoming place.**

That doesn't mean there aren't political issues that need to be taken into consideration and security that needs to be, all of those are important considerations.

But the church itself should be a welcoming place. And how do you do that? How do you build that into your church?

Not just welcoming to, you know, the refugee and the international immigrants, but welcoming in general, right? To those who are not part of your fellowship.

I think it was Martin Luther who gets credit for saying that the church is the only institution that is created specifically for the benefit of its non-members.

And yet, most of the work of the church seems to be, on the surface anyway, taking care of its members. And I'm not saying they shouldn't do that.

But the Refugee Highway Partnership again, kind of challenges the status quo of the church and says, "How can we be more welcoming?"

Welcoming to our neighbors, welcome to the international, welcoming to those who are interested, maybe those who aren't interested.

How do we demonstrate, you know, the love in action that the church is really all about?

And so the Refugee Highway Partnership now has, you know, regional expressions in seven different locations, and an eighth and ninth is in process. Because every context is different.

You have refugee work taking place in Lebanon, Jordan, and elsewhere in the Middle East, well those are people that are, you know, kind of stuck and they can't go anywhere yet.

And we have work in Europe and North America, Australia, and Brazil, where there are resettlement things are going on, however many or few get resettled, but still refugee work.



The Power of Working Together

So the context is different in every region. So when those leaders gather together to say, "Okay, we're all doing good work."

And they ask what we call the partnering question, which is, "What can we do together that we can't do by ourselves?"

Or that we can do more if we were able to work together. And the answer is always there.

There's always things that we could do together that we can't do by ourselves.

Because most of the time the things that we're trying to do are bigger than any one entity could do.

[World Vision](#) has this massive budget and they do a lot of work with refugees in certain locations and places. They can't tackle this problem by themselves.

No organization, despite its size, can do it by itself, so we've got to work together.

We've got to be able to say, "We can do things. What are those things that together we can make a greater and bigger difference?"



The Multiplying Effect of Partnerships

Rob: I know in philanthropy that looking at partnership was, if you want to think about leverage in how can I take my dollar and multiply it through the work that I'm doing.

Well, there's the direct result of giving it, giving money to an organization that is servicing the needs of refugees, such as blankets and food.

Brian: Yeah oh, very important work.

Rob: And shelter and advocacy inside those vast camps that are, some of them have become cities they're so big.

Brian: No question.

Rob: Are almost states within states.

Brian: Exactly!

Rob: You know, and you look at the time of this particular podcast, you look at the difficult situation in Venezuela, or of course northern Uganda that continues.

You can go directly with your dollar or in a philanthropy or an institutional sense of funding, which is of course the work that I was doing, or that First Fruit does.

You look at funding a partnership and how does that then multiply as those partners come together and work together that, how does their work... I think it was you that said, "One plus one doesn't equal two, it equals 11."

Brian: That's actually an Urdu proverb, a Pakistani group.

Rob: Started in China.

Brian: Exactly, I'm sure it did. But the idea, yeah, the line in collaboration and partnership is usually one plus one equals three. Right?

'Cause there's an exponential growth. And what the Urdu proverb says, "No, it equals 2." Because obviously the one and one come together.

And that's the leverage principle.



The Impact of the Church's Relational Recovery Work

Brian: I think for the church, which is what we are primarily focused on, not just local churches but also gatherings of parachurch organizations that are assisting the church to be even better than they can be together or by themselves.

In the refugee work, there's great organizations doing that humanitarian kind of first-level work.

People are coming out of war, they're coming out of conflict, they're coming out of persecution, they're coming out of environmental disasters. And they have great needs.

They have the need for blankets and shelter and water and medical care and all that, and that takes place. And those are usually done by professional organizations.

United Nations is actually quite brilliant at that work. The challenge is: What happens when they become stable and they need what we call "the road to recovery?"

And that's where the church is expert. It's identity issues, it's dealing with trauma, it's dealing with loss, it's dealing with how do I move myself forward as a family? How do we deal with others?

And the church, that's right in our wheelhouse. So we have an ability, especially as we work together, to come and serve those people.

Not that we can't do that humanitarian work as well. But that relational recovery work, that's who we are as the church.

And so the ability to say, okay, even the UN has said, "Help us in that area, 'cause you guys, faith-based organizations are the best at that. We can't do that, please help us."

So even the United Nations was asking us to help. We've got to show a common front, we've got to show a unified, you know, purpose in that.

Rob: And each of us has a part to play. Each of our organizations has a part to play.



The Challenges of Partnering with Empire People

Rob: Let's talk about the challenge in working one of these partnerships when the organizations are led by--

Brian: Empire people.

Rob: Empire people who need to learn the value of kingdom work.

Brian: The kingdom, that's right. Well, not all of them are, you know, intentionally, not all of them are bad people.

The challenge is, as organizations get created and as they develop their culture, as you know in the funding community, there's a need for people to show and demonstrate their success. Right?

And there's nothing wrong with that. That's you know, you've given us some funding to do X, Y, and Z, and here's X, Y, and Z squared. We did great!

So you've got to demonstrate, you know, what you've done and how successful it's been.

But the way that's been communicated by, especially some of the fund development community in the United States, is people tend to have to take credit for stuff.

So the more they have to take credit for stuff, the less they tend to think, "Well, we can't do it in partnership. Because if we do that, then how do we take credit? You know, that's not who we are."

Rob: Yeah, we can't point to the result being ours.

Brian: We can't point to the result being exclusively ours.

Rob: Right.



The Secret Sauce: Learn How to Share Success

Brian: And so what I say in helping groups that really do wanna work together and have understood, not only the biblical mandate but the idea that it's more efficient and more effective, is you've got to learn how to share success.

It's the secret sauce I call it. I mean, once you've built relationships and trust, which is foundational to effective partnering, you've got to learn how to share success.

And I think that especially in the 21st century, not only are funding institutions like First Fruit and other foundations much more sophisticated in this arena and are much more experienced in working together, even among themselves in the funding community.

But they're looking for places where organizations are working together. And so helping organizations say, "Look, we're working with X,Y,Z, you know, A,B,

and C! All these different groups, and we're working together and here's our success together!"

It's not anything that a funder, even an individual funder, is gonna say, "Well, if they're working together I don't wanna give them any money."

In fact, the reverse is true. "Oh, they're working together, they're collaborating. Wow, my money could go farther then."



Partnership is Foundational to Christians

Rob: Well, let me tell you that one of the indicators I looked for when making a recommendation to my board, which is exactly what you do when you're an executive director of a foundation.

One of the indicators I looked for was partnership. And it was because of this.

It was, I wanna know that your work has a, that you are dependent on the Holy Spirit in your work.

And what I have seen through the years of being involved in this work, traveling out in the field with you and others and our mutual mentor, Phil Butler, who...

Brian: Oh yeah. He's the grandfather.

Rob: Grandfather of this movement.

Brian: No question.

Rob: Was that one of the indicators that you are sensitive to the Holy Spirit is that you are in partnership.

Because we each have a part to play and it's not necessarily the whole part.

Brian: Well, and that's such a biblical model too. It's the whole idea, what does it mean for the body of Christ to come together?

We all have different gifts. And the body of Christ coming together is that ability to bring our gifts to the table and see how we fit together.

And I think, you know, that key is so foundational to who we are and what we're about.

And I think it's one of the reasons why your book is so important to us and why you have been on the cutting edge of some of this work and you know, kind of encouraging people to work together long before the others have kind of followed your lead on that.

And the key is, if you have a community of giving and receiving, how could you not work together with others? It just makes no sense.

Rob: Yes.