

Partnering Principles Lead to Better Funding Proposals

The purpose of missionary partnerships is in building movements rather than building organizations. Movements are built through shared values. The benefits of building ownership through consensus is that every voice is heard, and a balance is achieved between process and action. Mongolia provides an example of taking a dollar and making it ten.

Introduction

Rob: Well, I'm back here with Brian O'Connell of [REACT Services](#) and my dear friend, and continuing in our conversation about partnering, money the communion of giving and receiving.

Let's talk about partnering principles.



Two Questions to Ask Before Building a Partnership

Brian: Well, when I talk to groups, either that are thinking about working together, as a multi-organizational, that's what we think of when we talk about partnering, there's strategic alliances that take place.

And we applaud those, and welcome those, but most of our work is trying to bring multi-organizational leaders together for the purpose of working together.

WHAT ARE WE DOING TOGETHER?

Brian: And the very first thing I talk about is the difference between partnering and partnership.

When you talk about partnership, the first thing anybody wants to talk about is the ship, not the partnering and so, I don't know if it's a Christian thing, or a religious thing, but that's the first thing anybody wants to talk about is structure.

Well, who's gonna do this? And how are we gonna pay for that? Let's get to that, but first, so the first principle that I talk about is let's talk about the partnering action.

What are we gonna do together. Let's talk about that first, and unpack that.

Then we can talk about how we're gonna organize, and how it's gonna work and all that, but if you focus on all of the ship oriented structures, you rarely spend enough time talking about, what are we actually gonna do together?

So that's the first thing.

WHAT IS OUR DIRECTION?

The second thing is, despite being in the 21st century, we use a compass, not a GPS system. There's no direct line, street by street, page by page directions on how to do partnering.

We gotta have a direction that we're going in. What's the compass say, what's our True North as they might say, in where we're going and what we're doing, and that, kinda leads to another messy point that we talk about and as we kinda build the airplane, while we're flying.

There's a great commercial by one of the delivery companies, that actually has people building an airplane in the sky while they're still, delivering their packages.

And so the idea is we gotta start working together and then we figure out the structure and everything.

So we're kinda building the structure, the airplane, while we're flying and that's a messy process.

Rob: It is, but you know in the book [The Age of Paradox](#), by Charles Handy, which was a very influential book on me.

Even though it was written in the early 90s, it is a very impressive book, even for today.

And he talked he previewed this idea, Virtual Organizations long before electronic means met virtual organizations could actually be cobbled together, without ever seeing each other, much less being in the same office.

Brian: Well and now, 21st century technology allows us to be in places instantaneously through.

Rob: But the idea was, is that you came from what you were doing and you came and you joined this virtual organization for the purposes of that, and then you went back to what you doing.



The Purpose of Missionary Partnerships

Brian: So, couple other principles that we look at, you and I have talked about this before this whole idea of how do we share success, and the importance of that in our work together.

Not only for how we might be able to help fund our involvement in partnering, but also in funding the partnering effort.

I almost always talk about partnering initiatives, or partnering efforts, so that I emphasize that first point, it's the action, it's the verb partnering, not the noun partnership, because that's that structure again.

And then finally, the piece that I, we and the partnering movement talk about is actually **building movement rather than organizations**.

There's nothing wrong with organizations but we don't wanna compete with in a sense the people that are part of our partnering efforts right.

And movements are built by values. Organizations are built by procedures and policies and rules, very important ones every organization has to have them it's part of governance.

But, movements are transmitted, they're caught. They're rarely taught, and that movements are caught through the values that are part of that partnering effort.

And we've talked about some of those values but the whole idea of building relationships, and having trust of sharing success.

And the final, the piece of that movement of values is the whole idea of how to build ownership, and how to build that sustainability.

And that comes through what we call consensus. That we aren't driven by democracy or principles of voting or anything else. The partnering efforts that work the best, are driven by this idea of consensus, which means every voice is listened to.

Doesn't mean that every voice is followed, but if you're listened to, and the direction is maybe a little different than you mentioned, you still feel honored because your voice was heard.

And that's ownership is what builds sustainability from a value standpoint and from a movement standpoint. Does relate to the financial sustainability as well.

Rob: And that consensus is literally built around the idea of what Jesus taught.

Brian: Exactly.



The Difference Between Being Action-Oriented and Process-Oriented with Your Gift

Rob: In terms of coming together to make something happen.

The some of the partnerships that I traveled to in the early days and that helped me really understand this because of the challenge of funding a partnership was really understanding the leverage and-

Because when you have money to give to a challenge, that you've heard about, such as evangelizing Mongolia.

At the close, when the Soviet Union came down, those of you who were born before 1990 and 1989 may remember the wall coming down, and may remember the Soviet Union breaking up.

But really what was even more important in our work, was the break down of their influence over all sorts of countries in the far East and all the Republics.

And as they began searching for their identity, people were flooding in with all sorts of things but the gospel also was given agency in these settings.

And how the agencies, the ministries that were working there. How did they come together?

And why would that be interesting to a funder when what they really wanted to do was get in there and make things happen.

So it's the difference between being action-oriented with your gift and process-oriented with your gift, and the majority of the money, the vast majority of the money goes to the action.

And that's fine. I serve on the board of a philanthropy right now, and we have a President that looks to both, I kind of tend towards process.

My fellow board member tends towards action. And our President kinda figures out how to balance between us.

Sometimes, we lean one way or the other but--

Brian: But you have to have a process, for the action.

And that's been one of the big challenges of our work, is we talk about this whole idea of partnering versus partnership, and we get into the challenge of language when we're working in multicultural settings.

And also multilinguistic settings.

Rob: And who can take, as you said in the previous broadcast who can take credit for this.

Brian: Yeah, how do you share success.



A Successful Partnership in Mongolia: Taking a Dollar and Making it Ten

Rob: So if we look at Mongolia, I was at the second partnership meeting, of the Mongolia partnership.

Brian: So take some credit, my friend.

Rob: There were more missionaries than believers, in Mongolia at the time.

And they did a survey, to figure out how many believers are there actually in Mongolia, and then the number was about fifty.

A few more now fifty plus many zeros.

Brian: Yes, that's right.

Rob: But as they were coming together, one the missionaries that were up working with the Yak Herdsmen, they knew that the problem was that the herds had diseases.

And that the were solutions for this disease that a mission called world concern and somebody right here on Whidbey Island, where this podcast is being produced.

Robert Plant, was a large animal vet working with [World Concern](#).

And so, World Concern was pulled in through David Andrianoff and some of the other early leaders that were working up there and they brought Robert in with his injections.

Brian: It's a beautiful story.

Rob: And the herds got healthy and these people said, why are these Christians doing this for us?

And they heard the gospel and the loving action of the gospel.

Well the partnership, caused Robert to have agency because the missionaries that had been working with those Yak Herdsman for years, had the relationship that he didn't have.

And he had the inoculations that they didn't have. And as a funder, I felt like hey, this is the best way to take a dollar and make it ten.

Was to just help the partnership pull those people together, and then they can go to their own constituencies, the agency working with the Yak Herdsmen, Robert with the World Concern, and the American Veterinary or Christian Veterinary Association.

They could raise funds for the costs of sending Robert there, the costs of the inoculations and all the rest of it.

So they had to go back to their constituencies but then they were able to do this beautiful work and today this church which is independent working on its own.

Free of the need of missionaries, and in some cases actually sending out their own missionaries now which is the health and strength of a mission movement.

Brian: And there's a strong evangelical alliance is created which is connected to World Evangelical Alliance.

Rob: So, both was needed the funder to the action people. And the funder to the process people.



The Difficulties of Communicating Partnership

Brian: Mongolia is an interesting story because it also illustrated, at least to us and to many of us who were trying to extrapolate principles and understanding this idea of language not just, the difference between nouns and verbs, but the difference between what our language means in different languages.

So the word partnering for an example or partnership, there's no such word in Russian, There's no such word in Chinese.

There's really no such word in even Spanish or Portuguese, which we would assume as even French, none of those have specific words.

And so we had to come in and kind of give definition to what.

Rob: You have some pretty funny, so what's the closest that the restaurants-

Brian: So, in the Russian language the word for team is Commander. And so obviously an English Commander communicates very strongly structure hierarchy.

There's a team leader for sure. And, that whole division so to speak operates as a team, much like maybe the military would, whereas that's not what we talk about when we're talking about team or working together.

We come together in round tables as equals to talk about each our different gifts. No gift is more important than the other, even though maybe some gifts are bigger than others.

And so communicating those principles in multiple languages and in multiple cultures in ways that people can get their heads around and actually apply those principles in their own setting.

That's one of the big challenges that we face and in all partnering efforts. And I think we're, I think we're succeeding in that.

But you know, even the word relationship in Chinese, you would maybe understand or know this, the word relationship to us means that we have, a good strong connection that we're connected in Chinese.

It means no, you do something for me, I do something for you. It's very much.. And I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with that. I'm just saying that's their definition.

And so we have to come in and either find different language and find different concepts and find different Proverbs, find different ways of communicating.

What do we mean by relationship and trust that can then transit transcend their original understanding of what that word is meant.

Rob: You know, we even struggled this in the early days of [First Fruit](#).

We had a brilliant Missyologist, Dave Bennet and a brilliant Attorney, Dennis Thumb and a lot of the proposals I was promoting up to the board at the time contained the word partner.

We want to partner with you was the one that got Dennis going because he's an Attorney. He saw the word partner and he saw, I'm taking responsibility for a fiduciary responsibility for everything here.

If your organization messes up, you're putting us in harm's way and we're going to have to take on the liabilities that you created.

And David saying, no it was a Holy Spirit work and so we actually had this argument even at our board level as to can we, how do we fund partnerships?

What kind of language do we have to create?

So even using English language among brilliant people who are very capable in their own fields, we still had to break that down so that even at First Fruit as a program officer, how could I bring a grant that said we want to partner with you.

Brian: Well and if you think about it, there's so many different definitions that even partnership can mean I'm married.

We kind of call that a partnership. I have a bunch of prayer supporters. They're called prayer partners, I also have some people who give financial gifts, those are partners.

So how do we make sure that when we're communicating what we mean by working together by bringing collaboration strategies by using different words to kind of emphasize what we mean.

Rob: In our absolute critical need for each other.

Brian: Yeah, it's beautiful.