

How Do Ministry Nonprofits Measure Success and Why Is It Important?

This week, we continue the conversation with Steve Delph from Seattle's Union Gospel Mission. We explore why nonprofit ministries should measure success, how the Union Gospel Mission measures success, and more!

Introduction

Rob: One of the things that struck me the most about the mission and that I use in the teaching, that people have heard if they followed these podcasts have heard me reference this.

And that is that when you're fundraising, if you can show people that... Well I guess what I'm saying is to a giver, an investor in ministry, your job begins with skepticism.

That's a natural thing that God teaches into us, to be aware of our surroundings, skeptical, but not cynical, to be thoughtful and investigative.

And when it comes to the fruit of ministry, how do you do that? And so basically I say, taste the fruit. See how the ministry works itself out and how the ministry itself judges its own behavior.

So how do you evaluate? Now you've been a part of a couple of really good ministries. Every home for- Not every home for child...

Steve: Every gen.

Rob: Every generation, right. Early childhood education program started around the world with, by the way, with talk finesse funding.

These are ministries that are self-run, self-governed, and self-funded that you helped develop through training.



5 Steps to Measure Success at the Rescue Mission

Rob: So you're very familiar with this situation, but as you are telling the [story of the rescue mission](#), you're also able to tell the story of your transformational program, the program that takes people from survival to fullness, wholeness in God. And you have five criteria for knowing that.

Steve: We do.

Rob: And so why don't you tell us a little bit about that and how that affects your ability when you're in a, let's say a first time fundraising situation with someone? Okay.

Steve: Yeah, it's a great question. And I think every ministry or any business should have this principle of measuring whether you're successful or not.

Not that you sold a product or you got money for the mission, but was the mission actually successful in achieving what you set out to do?

And like I said, being beloved and being redeemed and being reconciled, that's our ultimate goal is reconciliation.

So we measure five things.

1. ARE THEY CLEAN AND SOBER?

And the first one is are they clean and are they sober? But keep in mind that this measurement, Rob, isn't the day they get out of the program.

We wait for two years to measure it because we want to make sure it's lasting and it's stuck and it's real and it's legitimate, right?

Rob: So they need to be two years sober.

Steve: Two years sober. And we also want to ensure that that person is in school, continuing their education where they may have dropped out, or maybe where they need skillsets that they never developed.

2. DO THEY HAVE MEANINGFUL WORK?

So we want to make sure that they're either in school or that they have a job. And so we want to measure that two years later because you know that is important for staying off the street, but it's also important to be healthy.

Rob: For dignity.

Steve: It's important for dignity and self worth. And the reason we're created is to have meaningful work.

So that's another thing that we measure.

3. ARE THEY IN A SAFE AND STABLE HOME?

The third thing that we measure is do they have, are they in a safe and stable home?

And that's really important. You know, there's lots of debate in the homeless sector of should housing be first or should it, should that precursor all this other work?

You know, there's lots of debate about that but we do want them to be in a stable home. And so two years later, we make sure that they're still in a safe and in stable housing.

4. ARE THEY INVOLVED WITH A CHURCH?

And the fourth thing that we want is that we want them involved with a church.

We believe so strongly in the gospel.

True change and true reform has to do with having a relationship with Christ and being involved with a group of believers that can help nurture you and grow you and grow in Christ so that they can avoid being back in this situation and help others that are similar to their condition.

Ironically enough, at Union Gospel Mission in Seattle, many of the people who go through the program go through an intern program for 18 months and some people renew for another 18 months.

And many of them come to work for us after they graduate. And so many of them have not just a great story, but they are mentors to other people to do the very thing that they were in, which is just beautiful.

So what better place to have a person in church, talking to people in church about what real redemption is, and what God can really do in their life? What great evangelists, right?

5. ARE THEY CONNECTED TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY?

And then the fifth thing is, are they connected to family and community?

You know, one of the most devastating things of homelessness is that it breaks not just the society, just the brokenness of society, but it breaks families apart.

And we want to see that community or that family restored and those communities restored.

So we are looking for them to make sure that they're connected with family and that they're restoring that brokenness that got them there in the first place.

Rob: You know, on that last point, Steve, what I learned and is still true of rescue work and why I'm so enamored of [the programs that you're doing there](#), and why I continue to say this is one of the best run ministries is that when you've actually made it to one of these encampments or you're sleeping in a dumpster or behind a parapet on a roof somewhere just to feel safe at night.

When we did our search and rescue, there wasn't a day we went out on the sidewalks around our mission and didn't find blood from fights, people having just a simple snack stolen from them, they'd get beaten to the end of their life.

And so the people that were there on the street had blown through every resource that society could offer them.

Social work, mental health institutions, drug prescriptions to ease them back off of the stuff, and even some government programs.

And they've gotten to the place, where you talked about the police wouldn't go into the jungle, in my work, way back in the day, we were doing a rescue mission.

These guys would talk about getting arrested as if it was good because they called it three hots and a cot.

You got three meals and you got a place to sleep and you were safe that night. And you could get a shower and a little bit of comfort and friendship.

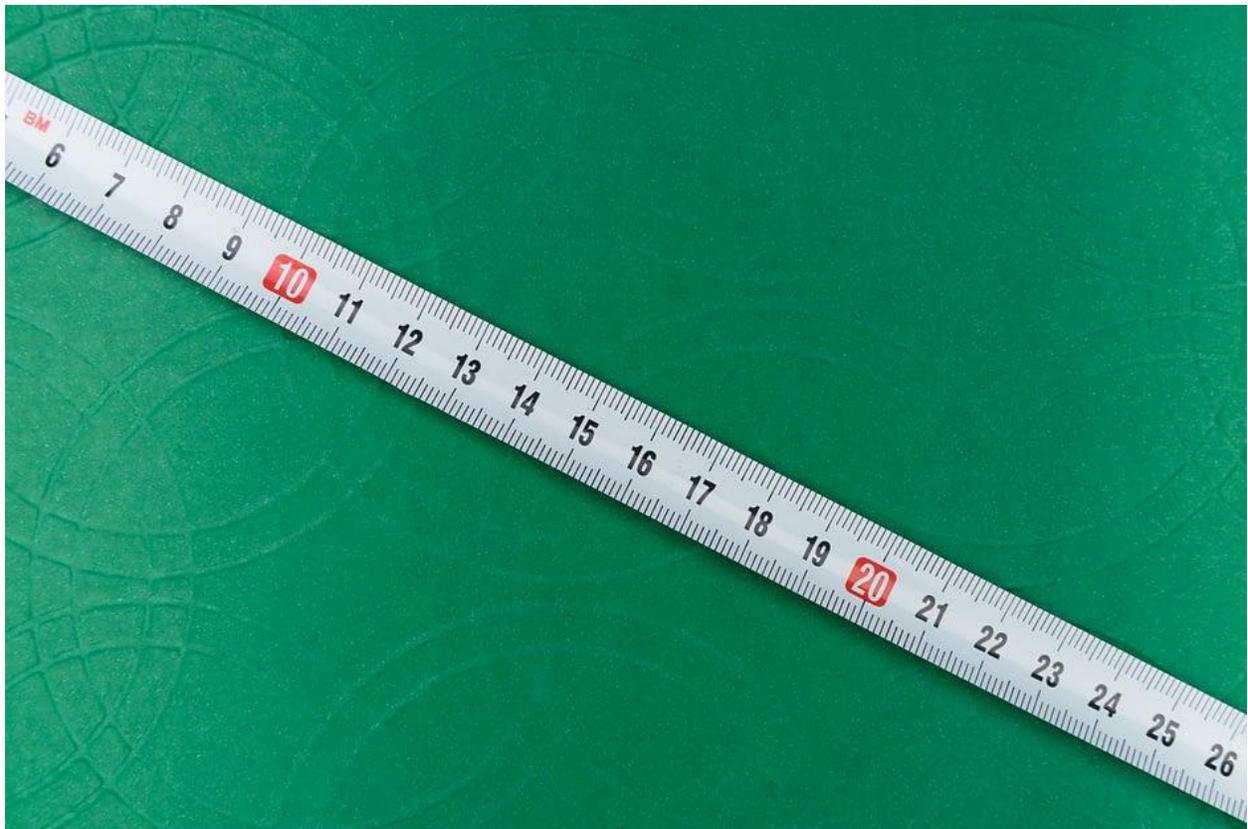
Not at the prison, but I'm talking about at the mission. But you know, three hots and a cot. Can you imagine thinking of going to jail as your salvation? And even there, the police wouldn't arrest them.

I saw guys break store windows to get themselves arrested. The police would recognize them and not do it.

And then when we tried to reconcile them with their families, we realized they had burned out their families. They had burned out the resources.

There may be mothers and fathers listening to this podcast who have a child who has run off, like Ellen's.

And at some point, some of these mothers got to the point where they wouldn't even take a phone call about their son anymore. It was too painful.



Be Rigorous About Your Outcomes and Don't Extrapolate

Rob: And so for you, these five criteria, every single one of them is as important as the other.

And in order to be considered a successful transition into a transformed life, they have to meet all five at that two year mark.

If they miss one, you don't count them as a success. You continue working with them hopefully to bring them in all the way.

And so the numbers are nearing 80% of people actually meeting all five criteria two years later, and anyone that's worked with homelessness or anyone that's known anyone that's been drug addicted or has been drug addicted themselves knows how hard it is to be clean and sober, to be reconciled with your family, to be in a job, to be in a community, to be known by the mission so that you always have a contact point that's willing to give you a donut and give you a hand up out of the mess and willing to listen to you.

That is an extraordinary number that no one else is able to achieve. This was confirmed, by the way, Steve, for your own information, in case it's been a while since we've talked about this.

When I was at the rescue mission, a donor sent me on a tour of the United States, gave me a small grant to go and visit every work that was similar to mine that was admired.

And one of them was Teen Challenge in Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York as it was getting started. And they had been studied by the US government where they had done a parallel study between those that were in Teen Challenge's new life program and those that were in either a government program, and then they had a third group which had no help at all. You know, no of any kind.

No AA, anything. And they followed these three groups for five years. And after five years, they discovered the Teen Challenge group was nearing that same magical number of 80%.

Four in five that went through their program were still clean and sober and walking upright with jobs. They weren't as defined in the same way as you guys are.

And that's one of the reasons I just keep talking about how much I admire this mission because you're very rigorous about your outcomes and you don't extrapolate.



Why Should Nonprofit Ministries Measure Their Fruit?

Rob: You're not trying to fool a single person about what you're doing, which will bring me to the next point of this question is that when you're

fundraising, and again, you're in front of someone new that doesn't know the mission, being able to tell them how you taste the fruit, test the fruit of the tree, how does that impact your giving and how would you tell ministries to be rigorous and vigorous about being able to measure their fruit?

Steve: Well, it's critical. It's critical for several reasons.

One, it's critical for another gift, if you want another gift. If somebody gives a financial gift to an institution and they never hear back from you about what their resources did, then it's a little disappointing to those who supported it.

But more importantly, it starts to build a bit of doubt. Like, "Well what happened to that money and the resource?"

So you do want to always let people know what your outcomes are, but I look at the outcomes and financial resourcing a little bit differently, [mainly because of my experience from the business world.](#)

And we don't talk much about this in the sacred world, but you can't change something that you don't measure.

And you can't improve something that you don't know what the outcome is of what you're doing.

So measurement is not just to tell you what you accomplished, but it's also to allow you to ask questions about what isn't working and helps this continuous improvement process be built into what you do.

So you start asking questions. Well, this part isn't doing as well because you're measuring it.

Whether it's a performance review of an employee or whether it's an outcome of the mission, the measurement isn't to bring value or judgment to the person being evaluated or the program being evaluated.

It's to help you know if you can improve. And if you know where you stand and what your activities actually achieve, then you can constantly be improving.

And there's nothing more inspiring to know that you're giving to an organization that is good, but they're only getting better because they're learning from what they're doing.

So measure isn't... It's not an evaluation of the worth that you have as a person or a ministry, although it does show a little bit of value, right?

If you're having good success. But if you're not measuring, you won't be able to improve. And what I always learned in business was if today you're the best, but you don't improve, tomorrow you'll be average because everyone else will improve and you'll just become the mean.

Or worse yet, you'll be worse than the mean, you'll be at the bottom. So you want to always be challenging yourself to say, "Is there something else I can learn?"

Is there something else we can do to be better?" Could we ever be from 77, 80% to 100? I don't know. But boy, if we measure, we have a lot better chance of getting there than if we don't measure.



How Do You Measure the Heart of Man? Something That's Unmeasurable?

Rob: Mm-hmm, wow. Steve, this has just been a great time. We're gonna go deeper in some future podcasts with a couple of other topics.

There's much to learn from you. Maybe we'll even get Kathy to slip in and be a part of one of the conversations and make us all look like the second rate folk we are compared to her.

But in any case, Steve, I'm really appreciative. I'm appreciative of the work of the mission. It's the proof that there is power in the gospel.

You know, I do want to mention one other thing about measuring fruit and get your comment on this as we're moving forward.

People will come back to me that are evangelism for example. And they will say, "Well what are you asking me to do? To tell you the heart of man? To tell you that they've had some sort of conversion experience because their mouth said it when their life doesn't show it?" You know, all of that.

So how do you measure something that's unmeasurable, which is the heart of man? Only God could measure that.

And what I think you all have found at that mission is this balance of indicators.

You want to see them involved in a church community in the hopes that even if they're not fully embracing the gospel at that point, they're at least around people that will encourage them and build them up and hold them accountable for their walk in Christ, which is what a church does, and equip them to be outreach themselves.

And so you can't look in their heart, but you can sure look in their steps. Your thoughts?

Steve: Yes. Well, I think when you talk about the gospel and salvation, and who brings salvation? Only God, we know that.

But there are things that you can measure. I wouldn't say that when you measure the gospel and salvation that there's a causal effect that says, "I did this one activity and somebody came to know God. And it was that activity."

I think there are several things. So there's no causal link between any one thing.

But I do think you can look at the gospel and salvation and redemption, and I think there are things that you can measure that would allow you to at least have indicators of several causal effects and achievements that you have that would give you an idea that redemption really has happened.

And I think that you could measure those things and we could be diligent. But keep in mind that **measuring and salvation isn't an end in and of itself**. It's the beginning of a process.

If we don't constantly see that the gospel is to help us grow and mature into more wholeness in our life no matter where we are on that spectrum of salvation, if we're not all growing to be more redeemed- Not that redemption has faces, but if we're not constantly being renewed with our mind, constantly being renewed with our spirit, if we're not measuring and looking and evaluating those things, I think we miss the point of the intention that God has for us.

Not to measure us, but to grow into the fullness that he has for us, to be closer to Him and more aligned with Him and able to give more of ourselves because we're healthier and whole.

And all of those are causal links that can show that the redemption is really solid in our life. And that to me is a beautiful thing. It's not a judgment. It's not a criteria that's hard to measure or I want to measure.

It's something that I feel is the beauty of what we do. If we can encourage, I can encourage you to say, you know, Rob, you help me in my life grow to challenge me in my walk with Christ.

And I've challenged you, I hope, with things that we've said and done with each other. That's what the body is supposed to do. That's the nature of God. That's the nature of relationship.

And that's a beautiful thing because it lets us flourish and bring glory to God because we know it's not us, right?

Rob: Yeah. Okay, Steve, I'm gonna give you a break now.

Steve: Okay.

Rob: And look forward to the day when COVID lifts and we can all hang out again once more man, and I can somehow invite myself to another dinner that Kathy cooks.

Steve: Absolutely, you bet.

Rob: And invite over here for another party that Bev throws.

Steve: Absolutely, thanks for having me Rob. It was such a blessing to be here and I look forward to some future time where we're gonna be with each other.

Rob: Yes, bless you too, Steve, thank you.