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What Matters Most in 2010?

Based on the extensive work that Triangle2 does with hundreds of YMCAs throughout the United States, we've gathered the collective thoughts and insights of all our partners and consultants in response to the question, "What Matters Most in 2010?"

Here's what we think:

Verifiable Social Impact

It doesn't really matter if you have the shiniest facility on the hill with the best equipment to mold six packs. It does matter if you are delivering programs and services that significantly impact people's lives – and you can prove it. YMCAs need to identify and deliver relevant and distinguishing services that are not commodities. Are your programs and services truly addressing pressing community needs? Are families stronger? Are people healthier?

Leading in a New Reality

Most of us have never experienced anything like the new reality we're all facing. Most of the relatively predictable financial foundations that formed our collective worldview have either fundamentally changed or collapsed. Intellectually, many of us have made the switch. We know it's different. We know it will never go back to the way it was. We have all reacted to the harsh realities of the last couple of years and made the necessary adjustments in our work and our personal lives in order to survive - but now it's time to lead in this new era. Are you ready?

Social Media

End-users are shaping products and services in virtually every company and organization in the United States and a YMCA's ability to capture this source of innovation will determine its future. There are many components driving the importance of YMCAs effectively using social media, but the most important is engagement. Members, program participants, volunteers, staff, and donors expect to be actively engaged (to the extent they want to be), to have the opportunity to weigh in, to be heard, and to see the results of their engagement.

Board Engagement

Board talent is the most under-utilized resource in the YMCA. The traditional YMCA board model, if not broken, needs a serious overhaul. The challenge is overcoming a social sector model from the 1950s that is used by most YMCAs where governance often trumps leadership. Board members want and deserve a meaningful leadership role that complements staff leadership and that adds true value to the organization.

Holistic Financial Health

YMCAs need to focus more on the health of their balance sheet as opposed to the final and rigid ending date of the current fiscal year. We all recognize the importance of balancing the budget, but especially in these challenging times, there needs to be an ever-developing and ever-evolving budget plan. Meeting fiscal year budgets should not compromise long-term program and service initiatives and should not gut the organization for the sake of meeting an arbitrary bottom line position at the end of business on the final day of the fiscal year.

New CEOs

Many YMCAs will be looking for a new CEO, if not next year, then within the next three. There is a “perfect storm” on the horizon accelerating this phenomenon: (1) boomers retiring (2) CEOs deciding they’ve had enough (3) Boards deciding they’ve had enough. Traditionally, CEO selection has been a series of events (CEO resignation, job posting, interviews, etc.) as opposed to a process that involves deep board engagement and an informed and intentional organizational match with the new CEO.

Long-Term Vision

There will always be a need for short-term strategic planning but in order for an organization to thrive, it needs to be done within the context of a long-range vision plan. Without knowing where a YMCA is ultimately headed, short term planning and strategic decisions can actually be destructive. Long-term planning shifts the planning outcomes to significant social impact as opposed to counting activities or numbers of participants. A longer timeframe allows YMCAs to focus on more significant goals as opposed to what can be accomplished in the next two to three years.

Member Engagement

It’s time for YMCAs to get serious about tapping into the extraordinary potential of their members. While everyone recites the casual, connected, committed manta, with an average of under 10% of members giving and volunteering, Ys are not getting close to reaching their potential. It will require YMCAs committing to a process of understanding the needs and interests of the diverse populations they serve, providing meaningful opportunities for members to get involved and volunteer, and ultimately inspiring members to give and engage others to do the same.

Authentic Volunteer Relationships

Volunteers want authentic relationships with the YMCA. It’s not about filling in boxes on campaign charts, following generic job descriptions and fundraising on-demand for 6-week cycles. Some of the top YMCAs in the country are seeing less than 60% retention rates of fundraising volunteers. If YMCAs invest the time to understand what volunteers want, the unique talents they bring and how Ys can support them long term to ensure they can have the greatest impact on the organization that they love... it will transform the Y’s ability to raise funds and fulfill its mission.

Collaborations

Part of the new reality in this era of limited and decreasing resources is that YMCAs will have ever-increasing difficulty of going it alone. The major opportunities on the horizon involve close collaborations with other organizations and institutions in the community: hospitals, schools, park districts, business developers, and other social sector organizations. Many YMCAs don’t play well with others. It’s past time to learn.

Targeted Communications

Here are the shifts YMCAs need to make in communicating with their constituents:

- from searching out prospective donors....to being “findable” by those who share a common interest;
- from "marketing" themselves.... to doing great things that people want to talk about and providing them ways to talk about it;
- from sending one-size-fits-all newsletters.....to giving people the targeted information they want in the way they want to receive it;
- from selling a generic fundraising case.....to offering donor choice and involvement.

Executive Compensation

There has never been as much scrutiny about compensation of non-profit executives – by the general public, by the IRS, and by internal board and staff members. An effective executive compensation plan involves a careful balancing act. On the one hand, it must offer a strong salary and benefits package in order to attract and keep the best possible candidates. On the other hand, it must not offer a compensation package that is out of line with the organization’s mission or with the overall culture of the nonprofit sector, whose work is regarded, both within and outside the sector, as properly being driven by mission rather than profit.

Build Carefully

If YMCAs can find the resources to do so, this year is an excellent time to build or renovate with the cost and availability of materials and the cost of labor all being relatively inexpensive as compared to recent historical highs. However, Ys need to be extremely smart in their commitments to new buildings and extensive renovations as debt financing and debt reduction campaigns are very difficult in today’s environment, and there is absolutely no evidence to support the notion that the boom and build health and fitness market of the ‘90s and early 2000s is coming back - ever. Objective data, market research, and feasibility studies need to support any significant capital expenditures.

The Ultimate Question

The ultimate question that matters most in measuring someone’s satisfaction with a YMCA is: “How likely are you to recommend this YMCA to a friend or colleague?” Those who answer this question “very likely” are promoters – and they represent a critical dimension to a YMCA’s survival.

Innovate or Die

Innovation will be the key to YMCAs that will emerge in the next decade as the go-to leaders in the movement. Simple innovation is not just doing something differently; it is a combination of facing the brutal facts armed with accurate data, thoughtful study and observation, careful pilot testing, and pragmatic implementation. Innovation should be pursued in all areas: membership, programs, staff development, board development, financial development, community collaborations, etc. Are you ready to innovate?

Now that we’ve told you what we think...

...We want to know what matters most to your YMCA in 2010

Please complete this survey: [What Matters Most to Your YMCA in 2010?](#) We will use the results of this survey to help us determine and schedule webinars this year. Also, for every person from your YMCA who completes this survey by January 31st, we'll enter your YMCA's name in a drawing to determine the winner of a **free webinar** customized and delivered exclusively to your YMCA to address your specific interests hosted by a team of Triangle2 partners and consultants.