



*Why Organizations Thrive – Lesson 11: Transform Your Organization Through
One-on-One Meetings
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I'm in the process of writing a long article entitled: *Why Organizations Thrive*. The article details fifteen lessons I learned while growing the Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV),¹ buttressed by my observations of dozens of other groups both in Oregon and across the country.

Collectively, I believe these lessons are a very useful set of principles that Executive Directors can use to improve their organization's capacity to fulfill their missions.

Lesson 11 is: Transform Your Organization through One-on-One Meetings.

I already devoted Lesson 2 to the subject of relationships. Relentlessly Focus on Relationships outlined the importance of relationships, the ways in which an organization can systematically expand the number of people with which it has personal relationships, and the ways in which it can then tap into those relationships.

This lesson is more specifically on the power of individual one-on-one meetings to transform an organization financially.

What do I mean by this?

Something happens in a one-on-one conversation that doesn't happen at events and certainly not via mail or phone.

You can form a stronger personal relationship and you can ask people to take personal responsibility.

Let's start talking about forming relationships.

It's not rocket science to understand forming relationships is easier in person. Legions of studies have demonstrated the role of body language and facial expressions in communications – neither of which works over the phone.

¹ I served as OLCV's Executive Director from 1997-2009. During that time, we grew from a permanent staff of 1.5 to 11, and a budget of around \$200,000 to more than \$1 million.

And in one-on-one meetings, you can make the communication truly two-way – asking questions of a potential organizational supporter and not just talking to them. You can do this in an authentic and not a staged way.

This formation of a personal relationship is half the magic. The other half of the magic is something I've discovered more recently.

When meeting with somebody one-on-one, you are asking them to take personal and not collective responsibility.

At an event, it's about how all these people in the room can help. One-on-one, it's about how you can help.

Studies done in the 1970s and 1980s focused on personal versus collective responsibility in a different context. Scientists had people fake epileptic seizures in public places to see who would help. The interesting thing is you were more likely to get help if you had the seizure when one person was there to observe than you were if several people observed.

This is contrary to what most people would predict. But it rings true upon further reflection. When something happens and other people are around, you tend to look around to see how they're responding. If everyone else is just looking around, you may think: I guess it's not my problem. But if there's nobody to look at, you know it's about you, and you alone.

When you're invited to give and the invitation is clearly about you, that's when people tend to step up and make larger donations.

In these contexts, as you get to know people, you're also in a better position to add in further opportunities for them to step up -- will they champion the organization to others, will they volunteer, will they connect the organization to their friends?

This helps explain why time and time again, organizations that invest their staff and board time in doing one-on-one donor meetings are quicker to transform themselves financially than those that bank on fundraising events.

So stop putting your time into the next great event and banking on social media revolutionizing your organization. If you want to grow, and grow quickly — get out and meet with more people and invite them to take responsibility.

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