



Enhancing Business-Community Relations

Doctors of Joy Case Study



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Doctors of Joy: The Clown’s Art Generating Social Transformation

Research Project Background

This case study is one of ten that were chosen as part of the ‘Enhancing Business-Community Relations’ project in Brazil implemented in collaboration with Instituto Ethos. These cases document examples of engagement between businesses and communities and can be used as learning tools for the promotion of responsible business practice and sustainable development.

The Enhancing Business-Community Relations project is a joint international initiative between United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the New Academy of Business. Implemented in seven developing countries, the purpose of the initiative was to collect and document information on business-community practices as perceived by all stakeholders, build partnerships with them and promote corporate social responsibility practices. It is also intended to enhance international understanding of business-community relations through information sharing and networking with other countries especially those participating in the project - Brazil, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa and Lebanon.

The findings and recommendations reflected in the case study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UNV, Instituto Ethos or the New Academy of Business. It is important to note that these cases were written as examples of business-community initiatives. They do not constitute a comprehensive assessment of the company’s social responsibility.

1. Introduction

This study explores the difficulties faced by the NGO (non-governmental organization) Doctors of Joy to obtain support for its cause from companies through sponsorship, partnerships and investments, difficulties caused by a lack of understanding of its mission and the distorted image that companies may have of clowns as agents to promote change in society.

This study also reports on the effectiveness of fundraising actions developed by the Doctors of Joy and their replication.

2. Regional and National Contexts

Western medicine differentiates the body-mind binomial. Traditionally, Western medicine separated the disease from the afflicted person, making doctors specialists in the disease and not in the cure as a whole.

This attitude is reflected in medical institutions and in their relationship with the patient. According to Bleger,² institutions tend to adopt the same attitude in their structure and their sense of the problems they have to face. The dissociation of mind and body that permeates the relationship with the patient rules the institution.

Nowadays, the medical area is trying to *become more humane*. This expression informs several professional practices introduced in the medical treatment of people in hospitals, including artistic performance.

Thus, although the action of Doctors of Joy has no therapeutic objective, only artistic interaction, it produces therapeutic effects.

3. Doctors of Joy

Inspired by his work in New York with the Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit, Wellington Nogueira started a similar project, Doctors of Joy, in Brazil in 1991. Wellington worked alone for more than six years as an experiment, trying to create a project appropriate to the reality of Brazilian hospitals and not just a form of entertainment.

Doctors of Joy is a non-profit organization comprising 24 professional actors specializing in the areas of clown theatre³ and circus techniques who receive specific medical training to do their work with children and teenagers in hospitals.

This group of artists started its work in 1991, at Hospital and Maternity Nossa Senhora de Lourdes. The group is affiliated to the Clown Care Unit⁴ of the Big Apple Circus.⁵ Its mission is to make it possible for children and teenagers in hospitals, their families and medical care professionals, to experience simple and pure JOY, amid the tension of the hospital environment.

As time went by and with the growth of working opportunities, the organization was established and a fundraising arm was created to guarantee its financial sustainability.

The objectives of the Doctors of Joy are as follows:

- To use their knowledge as clowns with art and sensitivity to evaluate the needs of each child, putting their resources – tricks, magic, juggling – at his or her service;
- To give back to the child a little control (over body and life) that was taken away when he or she became ill and hospitalized;
- To encourage a more positive and active attitude toward illness and recovery.

3.1. Project History and Development

This case study focuses on the work done by the Doctors of Joy as a whole, paying special attention to the fundraising area and the activities its members have developed.

Since the beginning of its activities, Doctors of Joy has given assistance to about 250,000 children, in nine hospitals from cities in the state of São Paulo. In 2001 the organization’s members paid 36,327 visits, delivered 63 speeches or interactions to companies and participated in 14 in different events.

Doctors of Joy has received many awards because of its actions, including the Dubai Award, the 2001 Human Rights prize from the Justice Ministry of Brazil and the UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) Prize. Granted by the Habitat Division, the UNICEF Prize placed the Doctors of Joy on a list of the best 100 practical actions in 1998 and 2000. The United Nations chose Doctors of Joy to represent one of 40 best social practices in the world in the year 2000.

In 2001 various actions by Doctors of Joy were presented 72 times in the electronic media (TV, radio



Figure 1: Doctors of Joy

and the Internet) and 164 times in the press (newspapers and magazines).

According to its members, the continuous work they develop makes the Doctors of Joy different. The work creates a relationship of solid friendship and trust with the patients in treatment, as well as inspiring the cooperation of medical care professionals. The young patients feel more at ease with medical doctors.

The fundraising arm of the Doctors of Joy started work by searching for companies that showed interest in sponsoring the initiative and benefiting from the association of the company image with the work the group developed.

As time went by, some companies sought out the Doctors of Joy to make small donations and were more interested in the tax exemption benefit⁶ than in promoting their image as socially responsible companies. That’s how the ‘Partners Club’ was created. It did not have a pre-defined quota for a donation (as happens in the case of sponsorship) to meet this demand.

A company willing to become a member of this club may choose one of the following options:

- ‘Maintaining Partner’ (contributions up to R\$1,000 [US\$286] per year)
- ‘Bronze Partner’ (from R\$1,000 [US\$286] to R\$9,999 [US\$2,857] per year)
- ‘Silver’ (from R\$10,000 [US\$2,857] to R\$44,999 [US\$12,856] per year)
- ‘Gold’ (above R\$45,000 [US\$12,857]).

The following benefits apply, according to the company’s investment:

- Receiving a report of the activities of the Doctors of Joy by e-mail every two months
- Receiving a welcome kit
- Partnership shown on the website
- Partnership shown on yearly activities report
- Tax exemption because of the federal law for stimulating cultural projects
- Speeches by Doctors of Joy founder, Wellington Nogueira
- Possibility of developing campaigns for advertising the partnership in the company’s internal advertising material

In 2001 Doctors of Joy raised R\$1,572,051.93 (US\$449,157.69) through individual and company sponsorship and from speeches made to entrepreneurs, NGOs and the general public.

Currently the Doctors of Joy have 2 sponsors, 32 companies in the ‘Partners Club’ and 1,007 maintaining partners.⁷

For Rodrigo Alvarez,⁸ the financial sustainability of a social organization comes from its institutional sustainability, that is, the more effective an organization is within society, the better it can accomplish its work.⁹ Professional staff, transparent behaviour and careful administration of resources facilitate the organization’s fundraising actions.

Moreover, according to Rodrigo, fundraising is the final step in a continuous process. The fundraiser’s work does not end when a donation is made; the fundraiser also must be able to increase the donation and maintain the donor. Therefore, Doctors of Joy fully believe that fundraising should be done by professional fundraisers employing full-time staff in a dedicated department.

With the aim of improving its relationship with the sponsors, throughout the years, Doctors of Joy has inserted companies’ brand names in its institutional material; the organization sends on-line

reports periodically, makes speeches in the companies and organizes periodical meetings to develop projects in partnership.

For those who belong to the ‘Partners Club’, a ‘relationship pattern’ was created. This includes visits to new donor companies to explain the terms of partnership and sending newsletters to the company participants. At the end of the year, an action plan for the following year is presented and companies are asked to renew their investment.

4. Main Results and Lessons Learned

After 10 years in operation, Doctors of Joy believes that it has contributed in the following ways:

- The clown culture is required, discussed and studied more often
- Similar initiatives have been created in the country
- Different kinds of public want to learn more about the cause of “joy and health”
- Hospitals have offered opportunities for artistic projects aimed at the welfare of patients and participants
- Medical care professionals have analysed their relationships with patients and their health, bringing art to their practice
- The Ministry of Health created a programme to humanize hospitals

Doctors of Joy intends to expand its work in the future in the following ways:

- Guiding and assisting similar groups and initiatives with a serious purpose to promote a more professional action
- Cataloguing and organizing these initiatives into a network of cooperation and development in Brazil
- Generating and disseminating its knowledge to larger and more varied kinds of public
- Investing in research to unveil the potential for this kind of action and finding and stimulating new forms of application
- Documenting all work done, created and implemented, to form and make available a data bank
- Promoting the establishment of a code of ethics for this segment

5. Conclusions

According to Rodrigo, some problems faced by social organizations for fundraising happened because:

- They failed to notice that fundraising is a long-term process that requires investment
- There was a lack of capable and specialized professionals in the market
- They lacked initial resources and that made the organization opt for a commissioned fundraiser, not committed to its cause
- They did not show interest in the potential investors. It is necessary to integrate the entity’s assets with the needs of the companies

Therefore, in order to make fundraising the means and not the purpose of a social organization, as seen in the acts of other institutions, organizations must focus on the education of professionals and invest in organizational management for their staff time in order to develop innovative and creative resources and strategies.

In 1991 Wellington Nogueira began visiting firms and businesses, hoping to set up partnerships where contributions would be eligible for tax rebates under the law for cultural incentives. He had little success. Nobody seemed to know about the cultural incentives law, so the interviews turned into lectures on social participation and fundraising; however, clowns just did not have a credible image. People would say, “Your work sounds beautiful, but it won’t benefit the image of my product; people hate the very mention of hospitals”, said Wellington.

The lesson Wellington learned from this experience is that “We have to find the right person in the company (the champion). This is best done through good contacts, who make the connection and provide reference. People give to people, not firms to organizations.”

Endnotes

¹ The views expressed in this case study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Academy of Business, UNV or Instituto Ethos.

² Bleger, J (1984) *Simbiosi e Ambiguita*, Editora Laetana, Argentina, p. 26.

³ Technique from the theatre that teaches the actor how to be a clown.

⁴ Project from Big Apple Circus, from which Wellington Nogueira, founder of the Doctors of Joy, inspired the association work.

⁵ New York-based non-profit cultural organization.

⁶ Rouanet law, created by the Ministry for Brazilian Culture, states that companies that make donations to registered cultural projects may deduct up to 4 per cent from their income tax.

⁷ Data from April 2002

⁸ Responsible for fundraising with Doctors of Joy.

⁹ Rodrigo Alvarez (June 2002)