

Sure-fire ways to kill a partnership

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With our work team's global partnership experience of over forty years, we have come up with three sure-fire ways to kill a partnership. Call a meeting too early. Try to write a constitution. And try to write a theological statement!

Calling a meeting too early

Successful partnerships are the fruit of adequate, often lengthy time spent building up relationships with those who might be potential partners in a network or partnership.

Long before a meeting is called, the results are best if the catalyst person has explored with each party how interested or willing they are to join in a collaborative effort. Only after that process is done should the catalyst person invite to a formation meeting those who are known to be desiring a partnership approach. In other words, the catalyst should already be confident, going into the formation meeting, that those who are there will say "Yes!" to the proposal to form a partnership or network.

Contrast this with calling a meeting too early: Without the research, you won't know what people will say or precisely how they will respond. It only takes a few "No, I'm not at all interested" responses to deal a death knell to the initiative.

Trying to write a constitution

This is a common misstep. Westerners, especially (but not exclusively), seem to want to develop form before function, instead of waiting for form to follow function.

We Westerners will often create grand sketches of organizational structures, stocked with committees and task forces - before we've even heard whether those in the partnership want to structure themselves that way! How counterproductive!

A better way: Create only enough structure to do what you want to do. Let your partnership grow and refine itself rather than trying to map it all out in advance. Partnerships are organic, not mechanical. Partnerships are a people venture, not a business or a governmental venture. Don't start off with a constitution-writing rabbit-trail.

Much better: focus on clearly stating the vision/cause that the network is aiming for, then rally around it any who assent to the vision. THAT draws together a wonderfully diverse group!

Trying to write a theological statement!

Again, this is another common misstep. But the fact is that those simple theological statements that we (in our own tradition) think are so accepted and benign, and which are so familiar to us, may well sound a bit foreign or distancing to "friendlies" who are just one tradition away from ours.

The whole POINT of a network is that it brings together those from different perspectives who nonetheless rally around a common missional purpose. Don't poison the water by trying to write a theological statement that everyone must agree to.

As Phill Butler writes in his book *Well Connected* (<http://snipr.com/wellconnected>), "Unless there is a specific reason for limiting who participate in your partnership, I encourage you to structure your efforts to foster a spirit of inclusiveness. We need just about everyone who shares our concerns and

vision."

Much better (as Phill Butler continues in his book): "Do everything possible to structure your partnership as an open environment rather than a close one. New participants should not only be welcome but also feel welcome. The last thing you want to communicate is that you have established an exclusive club.

By avoiding these frequent missteps you will increase the likelihood that your partnership or network venture will take hold, winsomely draw people, and accomplish its purposes.