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## Success Stories

### Sustaining Rapid Growth and Ensuring Future Success: Why the Ohio March of Dimes Engaged an Executive Coach

By Todd A. Uterstaedt, SPHR

#### The Business/The Organization

Founded in 1938, the March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency whose mission is to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality. They fund programs of research, community services, education and advocacy.

The Ohio division is a multi-million dollar organization led by state director, John Banchy, who has ten direct reports in five remote offices.

#### The Partnership

During John's tenure at the March of Dimes—first as the Cincinnati chapter's executive director for four years, and then as the Ohio state director for the last two—the organization has risen from one of the lowest ranking divisions to a top performer. In this time, Cincinnati's WalkAmerica has improved from a \$375,000 walk to a \$1 million walk. It is now ranked #16 of 1,100 walks around the country.

John has always experienced positive performance reviews and success. At the March of Dimes, he makes great strides and reaches or exceeds the benchmarks on profitability and productivity set by the organization. But John wanted to take the division to the next level with a goal to be the best in the country.

John encouraged his direct-reports to get a coach to help them in this venture, but found he first needed to set the example.

John engaged me to assist him with these goals.

"Your experience and background in varied fields, your experience coaching strong leaders and your commitment and trust were big factors in choosing you," John told me.

#### The Challenge

To take the chapter to the next level, John's priority was to grow as a leader and go from simply leading and managing well to completely embracing the role of an executive leader.

"I want that \$1 million walk and the other \$4 million in revenues to be sustainable," John said. "I also want double-digit growth in our chapter each year, without increased expenses."

#### The Approach

For the first three months, coaching centered on John's self-awareness and how to understand, appreciate and leverage hidden strengths in ways that create organizational value. He also worked on developing executive level competencies that would enhance his strengths in strategic planning.

"This process forced me to be honest with myself," John said. "It helped me see what my strengths are and then look critically at the things that can derail my success."

John learned to uncover, appreciate and leverage different perceptions, styles and strengths of direct reports. His ability to construct an effective talent management process that focuses on hiring, developing and retaining key leaders was enhanced. Crucial to that success was fostering an organizational culture focused on career and professional development. John also learned how to employ some of the evidence-based team development practices in the workplace.

The engagement helped John understand how expectations influence leadership style. During the process, he also worked on enhancing interpersonal communication techniques.

He said, "The coaching helped me adapt to any situation I encounter. Now I step back and look at a situation differently than I would have before. This can be hard. Managers can get caught up in that 'results now' mentality, especially when there is the need to perform and pressure to turn things around right away. During these times, it's hard to let folks do things in a different way, even when you know they can be successful, simply because you're in a time crunch.

"Now I better understand that you can get to the same goals by traveling different paths. Everyone on the team brings different skills and different core competencies, and can be successful in their own way if I give them the opportunity to do things in a different way."

John created a very open and honest dialogue with his direct reports and that was noted when peer interviews were conducted. Everyone was candid, open and honest because they genuinely respected and appreciated John and wanted to help. This open environment enabled John's direct reports to be engaged in such a way that provided richer feedback for consideration. John paid attention to the data.

As a coach, my role was to provide him with a clear, thorough knowledge of the tools we used both prior to and after their completion. These tools included The Chally, The Center for Creative Leadership's 360-degree assessment entitled Benchmarks and The Birkman.

What made the difference was the fact that John was highly engaged in the process, always did his homework, had great questions, took things seriously while being eager to learn and was open to new ideas.

#### The Value Delivered

After the ten-month engagement, John realized and set several benchmarks for future success:

- Putting new effort in the way volunteers are recruited, trained and 'career-pathed' or groomed. Volunteers are the foundation for the organization's success.
- Growing revenues from WalkAmerica, which were up 16.1 percent in 2006 over 2005. Revenues are projected to increase an additional 14+ percent in 2007.
- Continuing to reduce expenses.
- Increasing total public support and revenues by over eight percent each year.
- Chapter profitability was up ten percent in 2006 and is expected to exceed all 2007 budget goals, while again anticipating double-digit revenue growth in and beyond 2008.
- Chapter board giving (\$1,000 or more) was at 100 percent in 2006 (a first) and again in 2007, thanks to new communication approaches with the more than 100 board members representing the five Ohio divisions.
- Turnover of team members has been almost eliminated. The current team is in place to provide for continued growth.
- Utilizing everyone's strengths to their fullest potential continues to be a priority for the state chapter.

"Every expectation I had prepared for in my quest to go from a good manager and leader to a senior executive was exceeded," reported John. "In fact, my direct reports and the organization's national leadership team have both commented on my positive professional growth without even being aware of our coaching relationship.

"This coaching engagement will forever benefit me and the organization. If you asked me a year ago, I would have never thought this. But this engagement changed my career!"

#### About Todd A. Uterstaedt, SPHR

Todd A. Uterstaedt is president and CEO of Baker & Daboll, LLC in Cincinnati, Ohio. The company uses a Strengths-First philosophy that encourages leaders to focus on their talents and apply them in ways that create personal and organizational value.

[More about Todd A. Uterstaedt.](#)



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