

# THE BIG GREEN MEETING

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## **The Challenge:**

This non profit national organization has a network of member organizations (chapters) nationwide that function as separate corporations, with a membership agreement with the national headquarters.

The national headquarters provides consultation to chapters and assists with cultivation of corporate donors and other fundraising. Customer service (chapter) expectations are a driving factor in the activities of the national headquarters. Eight departments work with customers; each having a different perspective on customer needs and appropriate strategies to meet those needs.

The management team holds two planning retreats a year for strategic planning and goal setting. These meetings are very energizing: for two or three days the team lives in the world of possibilities- right brain, creative and very exciting. However, these planning meetings stay at the 10,000-foot level. When management returns from the retreat, each department is then responsible to develop objectives to meet the goals. Each department works independently, developing strategies for the same set of customers, to achieve the goals for their department, which then supports the organization-wide plan.

With a strong planning process in place, the team wanted to increase effectiveness in integrating planning and strategies among all departments. Also, the team wanted to improve implementation of initiatives and follow up.

## **The Approach:**

The management team had participated in a Whole Brain training and had all seen their thinking style preferences. Shortly after that training, it became apparent that what was missing from the process was the lower left brain activities (B) needed to ensure that big, bold ideas were implemented and that there was follow through.

The decision was made to hold an inter-department meeting of all management and other appropriate staff responsible for implementation. There had never been a meeting like this before. The goal was to take the organization-wide goals and department objectives and together determine what we would implement or try to achieve, how we would go about it (group vs. individual, training, presentations etc.) who would be the lead and be accountable for follow through. Additionally they would have a collective prioritization process.

They called this The Big Green Meeting to underline the purpose of the meeting. This was not a time to create new ideas and projects, nor to re-negotiate the annual goals. It was about process and procedure that would help all get the job done. It was about setting up systems for follow through and timeframes.

Green folders were provided for everyone and they did a whole theme around the meaning of "Big Green".

## **The Results:**

Participants were very excited with the process. There was a strong commitment to the final product. The meeting helped all become much more inter-departmentally focused rather than being locked in to their own departments. There was a great deal of sharing of information and camaraderie around the challenges facing staff. An unanticipated outcome was the strengthening of relationships between the different departments.

Follow up from the meeting was strong. Many of the commitments were kept and objectives achieved. There were several favorable outcomes that while may be a result of other factors, appear to be related to the meeting.

Working relationships were improved which resulted in greater inter-department communication. There were fewer occurrences of mixed messages to customers.

Travel expenses decreased (due to "fixing" situations that had not been planned properly) and customer satisfaction increased. The plan is to make this meeting an annual event. It will continue to be called the Big Green Meeting!