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Practical Solutions for Managing and Growing Organizations

Just Tell Them What You Do: The art of building stewardship

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As a Haitian-American, I felt a great deal of gratitude at the immediate and generous support that the world showed following the devastation of January 12th Port-au-Prince earthquake. Now four months on, the event is slowly moving away from the news headlines with the full knowledge that the road to recovery will be hard and long.

Like a number of my peers, whenever possible I responded to the financial requests from various agencies addressing a specific issue within the diaspora community or at the epicenter of the crisis in Port-au-Prince. However, to date I have been surprised by the lack of follow-up from most of these organizations. Just as Haiti is fading from the headlines, they now have a great opportunity to keep me engaged about their work and let me know the personal stories and the many struggles on the scene.

When I queried about a lack of follow up from one organization I was told that it feared that their stories were too sad to share. However, their responses to each situation was just incredible and there was hope in their action. I realize that for many organizations the resources are not there to compile a mailing and or e-mail blast. However, the simple act of keeping communication lines open with supporters has the power to keep these followers engaged for years to come.

With limited resources comes a balancing act. Yet, sustaining long-term support begins with the simple idea of building partnerships. This often starts with a simple thank you note and it continues by continually telling people about how you are living your mission every day. It is surprising how easy it is to neglect this activity when long-term strategies are discussed. In your development plans make sure that time and resources are allocated to support on-going stewardship. As any organization grows, keep in mind the simple acts of building relationships. Start the engagement now to have a long and happy life with your supporters.