



GOAL

\$900

\$800

\$700

\$600

\$500

\$400

\$300

\$200

\$100

PLAN FOR SUCCESS

by Debbie Hohman

It's not likely that you would leave for vacation without first choosing a destination, packing a bag or deciding on your mode of transportation. Whether it's a vacation, a staff meeting or what's for dinner, planning is an essential part of completing any task successfully. School fundraising is no different; in fact it's very similar to planning for a vacation. So let's get started.

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Choosing your destination should be the easiest part. The fundraising committee says, "We have X amount of dollars and we need to raise Y amount of dollars in order to purchase the new computers for our lab". Substitute whatever your need is and you're done!

Although that sounds like a no brainer, I have found that schools will often skip this step because their fundraising is planned more like a Field Day Event or Open House. It is on the calendar for August, November and January—but no one really knows what the destination is for those funds. Not planning for Y destination creates numerous problems including parent apathy, volunteer burnout and lack of financial accountability. On the other hand, planning for Y provides a goal that everyone can get excited about.

How are you going to get to your destination—by boat, by plane or by car (translation—by product sales, by carwash or by carnival)? Choosing the mode of transportation involves careful planning in order to reach your destination successfully. Product sales raise over two billion dollars annually for schools and nonprofits and are usually the fastest means to an end. However, choosing a quality product at a correct price point takes time and research. Fundraising companies that are members of the Association of Fund-Raising Distributors and Suppliers is a good place to start, but don't take a plane when it would make more sense to drive a car. Think locally as well. Is there a business in your area that has a quality product and would work with you on a fundraiser?

Having more than one product fundraiser annually is not the answer to raising more funds. There's a reason schools don't plan multiple carnivals a year because too much of a

good thing is counter-productive. I guarantee that if you put the same amount of energy and planning into one product sale per year, you will have more success and happier parents. In other words, your travel companions won't be asking, "Are we there yet?"

While on vacation everyone is fully aware of the day it ends. There is a beginning and an end, and barring a natural disaster, that is not open for discussion; so it should be with fundraising. That's easy to do with a fundraising event but more challenging when it comes to products sales. Plan to keep everyone fully aware of the day your product sale ends. That means effective communication prior to and during the sale so that the parents will know there is a fundraising brochure in their child's backpack. Post information in the school newsletter, and have reminders read during the morning and afternoon school announcements. Send flyers home, have the students make posters and use email or Facebook when available. With proper planning and communication, everyone will know when you have reached the end. Product sales that are allowed to linger are rarely successful and cause a delay in product delivery to your supporters.

We are almost through with our vacation analogy; there's just one last thing to cover. When packing for a vacation, it's important to include some fun: a deck of cards, the book you've

been meaning to read or maybe a DVD or two. When fundraising, you should also have a bag of fun packed that includes "thank you" prizes for participants. Fundraising professionals provide incentive programs, but using a purchased program is not always necessary. Again, think locally. Bring on the fun by taking your high sellers to the bowling alley, the movie theater or out for a pizza and ice cream. Local businesses are surprisingly generous with discount cards and donations when asked. It requires planning and good communication, but using prizes will dramatically increase your sales. Remember to "talk it up" so that all participants know about the incentives you are providing.

Finally, just like a well-planned vacation, everyone involved in your fundraiser will have a rewarding experience and look forward to the next "trip." Nothing breeds success like success so plan, communicate and execute to achieve all your future fundraising goals. ●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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