

. OVERCOMING .
CAPITAL CAMPAIGN
HURDLES

PASTOR EDITION



**YOU'VE LAUNCHED YOUR
CAMPAIGN AND THE
PLEDGES ARE ROLLING
IN. YOU DID YOUR
HOMEWORK, YOUR
SILENT PHASE WENT
WELL, AND THE PUBLIC
LAUNCH IS HELPING TO
SECURE MORE SUPPORT.
EVERYTHING IS GOING AS
PLANNED. UNTIL IT ISN'T.**



What do you do when your capital campaign hits a hurdle - or worse, a significant crisis? Every campaign will hit some bumps. Some are bigger than others! But you CAN overcome them, and in this article we'll unpack how to (1) avoid, (2) clear over or (3) recover from those hurdles.

A fundraiser's 'worst nightmare' is what a friend of mine likes to call her experience with a major campaign hurdle. She had been on the fundraising team of a large organization, and they'd spent many months planning the public launch of their new capital campaign. It was a festive, fun and creative event that got the hundreds of donors in the room excited about the future. Everyone was on a high, knowing they'd made the most of a milestone opportunity.

Less than 24 hours later, everything had changed. The organization's leader suddenly resigned - for reasons unrelated to the campaign - and the news sent shockwaves through the staff, donors, volunteers and the local media. The campaign staff found themselves in the midst of a crisis no one plans for.



HURDLE ONE

**LOSS
OF A
LEADER**

One of the most significant challenges any campaign can face is the loss of the leader, the face of the campaign or organization. For churches, this could look like the denomination moving the lead pastor, promoting the pastor out of the local church, or the resignation or retirement of the head pastor in the midst of the campaign. It also could mean the loss of a key staff member viewed as critical to the campaign's success (ie, your children's pastor when you are building a children's ministry wing).

Pastors, if you are the leader whose role is changing or who is at the center of this hurdle, it's critical that you do everything you can to smooth the waters you are leaving in your wake. You can set your campaign up for success even if you will not be part of the team going forward.

There are three keys to keeping a leadership shift from damaging your campaign's success:

1 Act quickly.

Unfortunately, you never have the luxury of time in these crisis situations. Church grapevines are lightening fast, so the news of someone's departure will get out in rapid fire. Not only do you want to be the one delivering and shaping that message, you want your members to hear it from you and not as a rumor so you can retain and build on their trust. Do not sit on the news of a pastor's impending move or the resignation of a key leader: Move quickly to get your messaging out in a brief, assuring but professional way.

2

Keep your messaging open, honest and concise.

Be as open and honest as you can in delivering the message. Anticipate and address members' and donors' questions while keeping it brief. Assure them that the church board and leadership remains committed to the campaign, and while this change is difficult or unexpected, you know the church community will face it together. Leave the door open for anyone who has questions or concerns and provide a point of contact.

3

Double down on relationships.

A major change might cause a pause in or slow the pace of your campaign for a time. But handled well, it can reinforce the need for your project. You can use this time to meet individually with donors and address their questions. In some ways, you're going back to silent phase mode - you're allocating time to strengthening relationships.

My friend whose crisis opened this blog remembers everyone on her team spending their days that week of their crisis on the phones and in personal visits with donors. They simply spent time listening and talking to constituents about the bright future of the organization despite the departure of the leader. Church members who are committed to the project can help you overcome a hurdle, but it will take an investment of time and a listening ear.

HURDLE TWO

**LOSS OF A
MAJOR
GIFT OR GIVER**

The loss of a financial commitment is another one of those campaign crisis moments. What happens if you have a major donor back out? How do you handle it if you lose your financing for a portion of the project?

Pastors, remember that no matter how significant a monetary impact it has, it's important that you not panic. If your campaign project has the buy-in and support of your congregation, you will get past this hurdle.

Take these steps:

1 **Regroup** with your key campaign planning team.

Be open about the impact the loss of this particular financing or gift has on the overall campaign goal, and engage them in discussing options. Put all the possibilities on the table and brainstorm other finance, donor and lending opportunities.

2 **Communicate** directly to your key major donors.

Inform them of the change in what's been committed and invite them to participate with you in working through alternative funding options. Sometimes the urgency or need opens the door to a donor or stretch gift you might not have otherwise received.

3 Rework the project.

Consider more manageable chunks and phases, timing out the project in a way to provide additional time to raise the needed funding. Or restructure it in a way that re-aligns the project to a different campaign goal, if needed. Again, seek the input and expertise of your key board members, campaign volunteers and donors.



Pastors, don't forget to tap into the creativity and connections many of your members bring to the table. Those who work in finance, banking or construction might have ideas about how to tackle the project with a new funding model. Sometimes a denominational or church-related foundation can be helpful with creative financing options. Sometimes local banks can compete against the terms of larger lenders.

Your congregation can be a wealth of knowledge and innovative thinking. Involve and invest in their trust by tapping into them as you navigate the hurdle of a major change in your financial pledges and commitments. Ask for help, and you'll find people are willing to extend themselves and help find solutions.



HURDLE THREE

SPIRALING COSTS

Rising project costs is a common hurdle for a campaign in mid-swing. How do you plan for and overcome spiraling costs? As with every pain point we've identified, the first step is not to panic. You will get past this hurdle as long as your campaign project has the buy-in and support of your congregation.

Containing project costs is a major concern that all organizations face, especially when their campaign project is construction related. As much as possible in the planning phase, anticipate rising costs along the trajectory of your campaign timeline. The costs of labor or lumber today won't be the same in one, two or four years. Build contingency funds into your plans, and account for "shovels in the ground" delays in your timeline.

But sometimes no matter how much we plan, a piece of our project exceeds the budget to the extent that our fundraising goal no longer covers the project.

Here are some tips for handling that hurdle:



1 Isolate the issue and try to match a donor's passion to that cost.

If you've been told the special flooring you need in your gymnasium extension is going to cost significantly more than what you'd planned, visit with key donors who have a heart for the use of that gym. Explain the alternative flooring and what a downgrade will mean for the use of the space. Try to find a member willing to help close the gap with a stretch gift.

2 Restructure your project and campaign in phases.

Perhaps you'll need to shell rather than finish the restrooms in the new children's wing. Once the main space is completed, members will be excited to help finish the space that was shelled or left unfinished in the first phase. Look at creative ways to move pieces of your project into one, two or three phases.

3 Regroup with your campaign committee and board.

Always communicate directly to your key major donors, and keep your stakeholders informed of the challenges and possibilities you're exploring to stem the rising cost issue. Sometimes a clear urgency or need prompts a donor to step up.

Lean on your members and your congregation's networks for help. As pastor, don't try to solve and overcome these hurdles on your own - give people a chance to get involved, help the cause and bless the project through their own investments.



HURDLE FOUR
CHURCH-SPECIFIC
SHIFTS

Capital campaigns have their highs and lows...moments of excitement, progress and joy as well as times of uncertainty, disappointment or even pain points. Some campaign challenges are unique to churches. Oftentimes these challenges are rooted in denominational leadership conversations and processes for approval within your church's broader structure. Some of these are within your control and some are not.

Some denominations carefully manage which congregations can be in the midst of a campaign. Some do not want to have multiple churches in one geographic area or city in a campaign at the same time. Still others manage the facilities plans for their member churches, who must go through a process

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of approval for acquiring/ renovating property, launching church plants or making other capital improvements. Obviously, much depends on how the church leadership or denomination ownership of property is structured, which dictates what individual congregations can and can't do without approval.

These issues are within your control in the sense that you plan for them

so they don't cause a snag once your campaign is underway. Pastors, ensure you and your board leadership is well versed in your church or denomination's processes related to campaigns, capital projects and financing agreements within congregations. Long before you've solidified a project or loose timeline, have the appropriate conversations with your denominational leadership. Some churches learn they have to time out their building purchase, loans or the campaign itself in a queue of others, or that there are other denominational issues that will shape the campaign plans in some way.

Some hurdles you will not be able to plan for and avoid, and those can also stem from denominational challenges or changes that impact your local congregation. The last decade has seen a shifting landscape of denominational divides, splits and shakeups related to theological differences and social issues. When you are launching a three- or five-year campaign, there's no way to know what external church factors may pop up in the course of that. What do you do if your denomination finds itself in a spiral of negative news or in a crisis that threatens to divide it?

Be open and transparent. Stay on top of any possible fallout that could affect your project, your finances or your members. Communicate often to your congregation - but in doing so, be clear about what does and does not affect your campaign. While it might not feel like it in the moment, a denominational crisis at the national level might actually have very little, if any, impact on the campaign for your new children's ministry wing. Don't "borrow trouble," as the saying goes - some members might not tie your campaign progress to the other issues at all. Instead, listen closely for any concerns or issues that need to be addressed as you interact with your campaign volunteers and donors.

Your campaign can still succeed even if it means shifting the phasing, timing and scope when you hit a snag or hurdle. Remember that our members are involved because they believe in God's call to our congregation and in our mission to advance the Kingdom. Remember that human and church history is filled with crises and divides that have been overcome. Trust that God will lead you and your members through this time, strengthening your ministry and impact.

— — — — — TIMOTHY L. SMITH — — — — —

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