

A MODEL NONPROFIT PLAN SUCCESS MEASURED BEYOND NUMBERS

BY CHRISTINE M. MEADOR

Last fall, I had the opportunity to write an article on the benefits of having a Disaster Response or Response Plan in place. As a matter of practice in relation to my work, I have had great exposure and involvement in the development of such “plans.” However, when I thought of “disaster,” many years back, being from Ohio, I pictured something such as a tornado, a flood, or perhaps some unforeseen event, whatever that may be. As time moved on, I discovered “disaster” could be spelled out by many different things, such as “hackers and ransomware,” which suddenly placed cybersecurity at the forefront in protecting companies and their information. Little did I realize at the time “disaster or unforeseen event” could be spelled out as a worldwide “pandemic.”

RESPONSE PLANS: ARE YOU PREPARED?

“A Response Plan is a plan of policies and procedures designed to deal with critical situations such as disasters or emergencies. These plans are often layered and vary according to each organization’s unique needs. These days, we are seeing Response Plans ‘kick into action’ with policies and procedures focusing on the pandemic, such as health & safety protocols and often business interruption.” (JB article, Aug 30, 2020). Whatever the “disaster” is, having some sort of contingency plan in place prior to a threat can be the key to success.

The success of a Response Plan may very well be determined by the initial plan and the ability to adapt that plan to an unforeseen threat. In the end, an emergency plan would be the first step in protecting an organization in the event of some unforeseen disaster or mishap that would put your business at risk. Do you have a plan and are you prepared?

RESPONSE PLANS: A NONPROFIT MODEL DEFINING SUCCESS

The following section takes us into the article titled, “Julie Billiard Schools – A Beacon of Leadership in A Time of Crisis,” showing us one nonprofit’s strategy to adapt to the pandemic while focusing

on the nonprofit mission. I am using JB’s approach as a model example of “what to do.” This nonprofit model shows what happens when “crisis” meets “management,” and how adaption and response lead to success in more ways than one.

“Julie Billiard Schools (JB) are a network of local schools in our Northern Ohio community that offer specialized education to children in grades K-8, with special needs and learning differences. ...

Recently, I came across a post on Julie Billiard Schools’ Beyond Camp summer program. Beyond Camp was nearing completion and a JB mission success story. ...With all the difficulties placed upon businesses and schools during this time, I was pleased to hear of the program’s success. I found this inspiring and was not surprised as I had firsthand experience with the schools’ staff and commitment to the mission under normal circumstances. I felt with such a leadership team in place, it would be beneficial and inspiring to other organizations to see how this ‘team’ managed these challenging times to meet the mission. ...

I had the opportunity to reach out to the school to discuss their approach during this time. In this case, Julie Billiard Schools’ Director of Marketing, Samantha Voshall, and the President/CEO, Lannie Davis-Frecker, shared the schools’ Response Plan. ...

To help us better understand the schools’ plan, Lannie and Samantha walked me through the development and implementation of their Covid ‘Response Plan and Response Team.’

In March 2020 – Initial state restrictions

- JB learned of the new restrictions and had one week to transition to distance learning. The school relied on and credits the teachers for the work required to make this critical and quick transition possible.

In April 2020, JB formed a Response Team

- The JB team consists of eight leadership members from across the organization:

President and CEO, Lannie Davis-Frecker, M.Ed.; CFO, Judy Kreger, CPA; Lyndhurst Principal, Jodi Johnston, M.Ed.; Akron Principal, Jason Wojnicz, M.Ed.; Westlake Principal, Samantha Evers, M.Ed.; Director of Advancement, Anne Jarrad; HR Manager, Michelle Skoletsky; and Director of Marketing, Samantha Voshall, MBA.

- In April, the response team began meeting daily.
- The team developed a number of critical questions, all of which were key in the success of fulfilling the JB mission as well as the operational aspect.

In May 2020 – Continued response team meetings

- In May, the response team continued daily meetings.
- JB conducted a year-end survey to families. This was a great way for the organization to check in with parents to see how the school did, what went well, and what the families needed.
- The team continued to look ahead to summer and fall planning. The team focused on scenarios such as if the students could not return, what were the options.

June and July 2020 – Solidify plans for the fall

- The fall plans included professional development, measuring of classrooms, and monitoring the summer Beyond Camp.
- JB concluded the Beyond Summer camp program, which was extremely successful due to all parties involved. The four-week program served approximately 52 children.
- Julie Billiard Schools and leadership credits counselors, families, and the children for the success of spring semester 2020 and the summer program.
- As JB moves into the school year, the school continues to utilize the careful and meticulous coordination of the JB Response Team, along with the teachers and counselors.”

For the full article, visit: <https://bit.ly/3nNC1TS>

How JB “Did it” – Additional Suggestions

In the *JB Article*, I go over the development and implementation of the JB plan. Now let us look at some of JB’s additional recommendations:

First – Start Early: Implement a “Plan” with a Response Team

As a school, JB had various “contingency plans” in place; however, the schools did not have a plan for a “pandemic on the radar.” The schools’ ability to adapt the plan to an unforeseen scenario or disaster, such as a pandemic, is what set the stage for the plan to move into action. The team consisted of a diverse group from within the organization. Each member offered specific talents to the team.

Second – Have an “Open-Door” and Acknowledge Concerns

JB Released a Statement Acknowledging the Threat Back in February, JB started to receive feedback and concerns regarding COVID-19. The school did not disregard the concerns. JB acknowledged the concerns as being “valid concerns.” The schools realized the threat was not going away and it was clear the pandemic would affect the way in which JB operated.

JB Communicated What They Were Doing About the Concerns

JB expressed there was a strong need for the team to quickly adapt to the change and their method of communication. The team went through a process, learning along the way. In the beginning, the team realized they needed to change their approach and be more open in communications with teachers, parents, and students “in order to make this work.”

Third – Set Goals, Times, and Agendas

The JB team started by setting goals and guiding principles. The CEO introduced beginning goals for the team to refine. The entire team worked together to solidify a set of strategic goals and guiding principles to follow. The guiding principles have been the roadmap used by the team through this entire process. As Voshall states, “If there was a road-block, we would always refer back to the guiding principles of putting the safety of our students, faculty, and staff first.” In addition, the team coordinated, using applications like Google Docs to share, keep up with regulations, and stay connected.

Fourth – Be Consistent

The JB team realized they must be consistent in communicating with the teachers, parents, and children. In addition, sticking to policies and procedures is critical, especially when an entity has multiple locations. This would be important, for example, in the event of contract tracing and new policies. JB explains this was difficult in the beginning as mandates were constantly changing; therefore, communication was critical in maintaining consistency.

Fifth – Use Your Resources Wisely – Signage, Procedures, and Board

Resources and tools, such as signage, along with new policies and procedures, were critical in developing the required changes to ensure a safe and healthy environment for the schools. In addition, as there are many professionals on the Board of Directors, the Board itself became a resource. In this real-life scenario, we see how teamwork was required at every level of the JB organization for the Response Plan to work. As a traditional board, the JB Board relies on JB leadership to manage. At times, JB administration sought guidance and legal feedback from Board Members in brainstorming sessions about rolling out critical new health and safety policies. This is a model example of board and leadership working together.

Sixth – Consider the Many Voices of JB Constituents

JB puts great emphasis on the need to consider the “many voices of their constituents.” Some are opinions, some recommendations, and others are mandates. For example, JB explained masks for children went from opinion, to recommendation, to mandate in a short period of time. In the end, the school must follow state and national guidelines. Therefore, JB communicated, “Here is the requirement and here is what we are doing to meet it.” In addition, the ability to adjust and offer other options for individuals unable to meet certain requirements is essential, such as offering a virtual option from home, which will still offer the same education.

Seventh – Always Be Prepared to Change the Plan

JB maintains the current course; however, the schools’ Response Plan and Response Team is prepared to adapt in the event of change with additional plan options if necessary.

WHAT DOES THIS MODEL SHOW? – SUCCESS IS NOT ONLY MEASURED IN NUMBERS

As of my follow-up with JB Schools in early October of 2020, JB reported zero cases of COVID-19; although “numbers” help measure, success is not only measured by numbers. Success is how you respond to the pressure or problem. In fact, success can be measured in prevention, strategy, process, and response. In a nonprofit delivering education to children, success can be measured by the continued educational service, the safety of all involved, and the response from all. Perhaps your organization has thousands of attendees, and you have an incident or threat. It is the response to the threat that will ensure a successful outcome. In a pandemic, the likelihood that it will occur is high, so the question is, “Are you prepared if and when it happens, and how will you deal?” So in the end, a true success story may be how you respond to the threat, pressure, or problem, not if you ever had an incident.

The success of a Response Plan depends heavily on the organization’s ability to adapt and respond. Whether you are a large or small institution, a successful plan is where “crisis” meets “management.” If a plan allows the organization to respond, to secure the crisis, and to reduce the damages or risk, then this may be deemed as a success. As I have laid out in the JB model, “Julie Billiard Schools’ story is an example of how one organization’s mission can adapt to a challenge and still have a successful outcome.”



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