

The Story—and the People!—Behind Making Strides Against Breast Cancer

a behind-the-scenes look... and snippet of fundraising history

THE BACKGROUND

This past October marked the 25th anniversary of one of the nation's leading resource development initiatives in the fight against breast cancer—the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer event.

In 1992, the American Cancer Society's Massachusetts Division engaged Biondolillo Associates to make recommendations regarding its then seven-year-old Making Strides Against Cancer walkathon, which had reached a \$200,000 plateau.

Biondolillo Associates, which had brought the walkathon movement to scale in the mid-1980s by developing the world's first \$1 million, \$2 million and \$3 million walkathons—made two seminal recommendations:

- Focus the Making Strides Against Cancer event in the area of breast cancer, and
- Employ a staff-centered organizational model in order to achieve large-scale objectives and multiply the organization's donors and other volunteers.

Biondolillo was then retained, in 1993, by the Massachusetts Division to develop capacity in large-scale special-event fundraising using the Biondolillo peer-to-peer fundraising model, whose backbone is the nation's most comprehensive special-event fundraising training program for nonprofit staff and volunteers.

As a result, the 1993 event drew 6,000 participants (in the rain) and raised \$660,000, more than tripling the results of the previous event. For the next 20 years, Biondolillo guided the growth of Making Strides Against Breast Cancer from coast to coast.

THE MODEL

The human resource structure of the Biondolillo Model is conceived in four parts:

- The hiring of a dedicated event manager (often called the Recruitment Manager) tasked to lead by example and focused primarily on the recruitment of new volunteer relationships in the corporate, municipal, hospital, and health-related sectors.
- The involvement of all staff—including resource development, program services, advocacy, communications, and administrative personnel—in the all-critical donor outreach/acquisition effort.
- The assignment of staff into eight multi-part organizational areas, and the setting of goals for each staff in each area.
- The involvement of Biondolillo Associates as a player/coach, providing expert training and 24/7 consulting services throughout the course of the campaign.

The Biondolillo training itself involves eight core days of service delivered in couplets on a bi-monthly basis:

- Comprehensive Orientation, including the principles of "populist" peer-to-peer fundraising
- Corporate Sponsorship Training, especially focused on the "Flagship" model
- Reality-Based Goal Setting
- Organization for Large-Scale Events
- Action Planning for Community Targets
- Donor Outreach/Acquisition Training

- Relationship Management Training
- Large-Scale Logistics

Each of these six-hour training days involves a complex agenda, and is delivered through multiple learning modalities, including lecture, planning and other work exercises, Socratic interplay, video and/or power point presentations, comprehensive role-play, and field exercises.

THE IMPACT

The program's impact over the years has been extraordinary. To wit... Strides has enabled the American Cancer Society to establish a leadership position in the competitive arena of breast cancer resource development. The event has been the American Cancer Society's lead corporate relationship acquisition vehicle. It has generated the organization's largest earned television and radio sponsorships, and largest press clipping books. It has been the engine for a handful of multi-million-dollar government appropriations, as well as supported a handful of capital initiatives. And, critically, Strides' high-touch training and management techniques have been employed to help grow and develop other American Cancer Society fundraising programs, including Relay for Life.

Most notably, since the inaugural *USA Today* ranking of the nation's "Top 10 Charitable Fundraising Events," Making Strides Against Breast Cancer has appeared on each and every list!

WHODUNIT?

Upon reaching the 25th anniversary of anything, a proud organization will look back and give some credit to its "pioneers," "drivers," and "early adopters"... and Biondolillo is just that kind of organization!

Here they are:

Don Gudaitis, former Division CEO, who disrupted long-standing American Cancer Society policy against "single-cancer-site" fundraising initiatives and was willing to back the Biondolillo Model's shifting of accountability for volunteer recruitment from conventional committee volunteers to staff.

George Barker, former Division EVP, who provided the majority of the funding for the initiative during its first five years, and was the organization's first executive to launch multiple events.

Don Distasio, former Division CEO, who led Strides nationally by example, who organized the first wave of national Strides conferences, and who was the initiative's greatest division-by-division leadership voice.

Rita Pastore, the first-ever Strides Manager, who grew the Boston Strides into a multi-million-dollar event by the initiative's fifth year, who headed up and managed the Biondolillo national training team for 15 years, and whose personal Strides legacy will never be surpassed.

The Biondolillo National Training Team, the best special-event fundraising training team ever assembled, including Jenny Desmond, Cathy Nolan, Kathy Rolfe, Lana Lessem, Ann LaSalle, and Maria Puglisi, as well as Diane Remin, Michael McDermott, Terry O'Connor, and (in early days) Betty Heiman.

The leaders by Division—enthusiastic risk takers, pioneers and drivers, who championed the program:

New England – Sue Bassett, Linda Uhler, Bruce Marshall, Chris Boynton

New York – Gary Burd, Karen Radwin, Jeannie Walsh, Terri Kip

New Jersey – Dick Arndt, Jim Nealy, Tom Duffy

California – Ken Hickman, Jill Granek, Jill Arnstein, Guy Fischer, Pat Felts, Kathleen Moore, Kathleen Seymour, John Lazar, Kristen Boelter, Melissa Mellor

Mid-South – Elaine Gordon, Lisa Roth, Wayne Miller

Illinois – Ann McNamara, Erin Richey, Steve Derks

Great Lakes – Nancy Yaw, Don DuChateau, Cal Morgan

Southeast – Gail Roddie-Hamlin, Jack Shipkoski, Brant Woodward, Liz Davey

High Plains – Brad Bunde, Jamie Fassnacht

National Home Office – Kristin Solt, Jeff Rountree, Becky Burkett

Much praise and many kudos, also, go to the hundreds who served as dedicated Strides recruitment managers, and the thousands of staff who helped catapult the American Cancer Society, not only through their disciplined execution of the Biondolillo Model, but all that the Model did to support the organization's achievement of its erstwhile \$1billion mark.

There's a difference between being an enthusiastic early adopter willing to take the blows, bumps, and bruises that come along with meaningful and game-changing DISRUPTION and being a shrewd follower... although it takes the effort of both to produce a winning game at scale.

On behalf of the Biondolillo Training Team, almost nothing in our careers has given us as much pride as the role we played as the American Cancer Society's often controversial, but always EFFECTIVE change agent... and, oh yes, drill sergeant! The evidence was in both the ranks and the results... and the proof was in the "ring-ring"!

Steven H. Biondolillo
November 4, 2017