Let’s let ‘em know: We are winning

Kirk Walden, Publisher of The LifeTrends Connection

We can’t emphasize it enough: Those who will support us financially and those who will volunteer for us want to join a winning team. Our constituents want to be a part of an organization that has both vision, and a growing track record of success.

We’re not talking about hiding from reality; far from it. But chances are, most of those who support and volunteer for us know the bad news. They know the abortion rates. They have an idea of out-of-wedlock pregnancy rates. All they have to do is turn on their televisions or scour the internet for five minutes to find the bad news.

But there is one place in this world where they can find an organization that is having success in reaching out to those who are hurting, mentoring those who need a hand and in the process, saving lives. That’s you and your center.

You . . . Make the difference
If you are discouraged, I understand. But think of this . . .

• Every time you show the love of God to a client, you advance the kingdom of God, just as the apostles in the Book of Acts
• Every time a mom chooses life, you are playing a role in honoring the Creator of Life
• And finally, God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary tasks. Throughout scripture, we do not see God using the famous, the rich, the movers and shakers. He uses people with open hearts who choose to follow His leading.

Yes, you make the difference. And for that reason, we are winning even if we can’t yet see it.

Our message
Our message to clients is always one of hope; is it not?

With our constituents, we need to send forth that same message. They need to share every victory with us; they need to join us in a bright vision for the future—because we are in this work together.

This month let’s take a look at the third step in pledge fulfillment, “Winning Updates.” When we keep our constituents up to speed on the mighty work of God within our center, they will stay with us and perhaps even find ways to increase their involvement.

Let’s tell ‘em the truth: We are winning. Let’s share the joy.

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Here is the simple truth: We are in this together. As those involved in life-affirming ministries and organizations, we are strongest when we are side-by-side; supporting, encouraging and assisting each other as we forge ahead, advancing the message and hope of life.

LifeTrends wants to be part of this process of Supporting, Encouraging and Assisting. And if you pick up on the acronym, it’s SEA—so perhaps this means that together we can create a “SEA Change” toward life, who knows? Here is how:

Supporting
How can I—and LifeTrends—pray specifically for you and your center? Is there an initiative you are considering or implementing? A challenge you face? Let me know. Email me at kirk@lifetrendsonline.com and you can be assured that I will pray for you, and get back in touch later to see how things are going.

Encouraging
Use the email address above to let me know of successes in your work. Your victories will encourage others. In the next few weeks we will begin posting some stories (with your permission, first) on our Wall of Hope Challenge web site. As you tell your stories, others will be encouraged to stay strong and stand tall.

Assisting
Send me your ideas and questions for future issues of The LifeTrends Connection. You would be amazed to know how many times (hint, it’s a lot!) your questions turn into a full issue of this publication. The reason? I find many of you are asking the same questions so we want to address them in TLC.

To get full use out of The LifeTrends Connection today . . .
One way we at LifeTrends can help you is to make sure you are able to access every feature of this publication effectively. Here is how:

Boards of Excellence: Send this to your board members via linking or emailing. This one-pager is designed to encourage and envision this important group.

Servants of Excellence: This devotional is for anyone involved with your center (friends, too!). Feel free to forward.

Thank you letter on page 6: Looking for an idea on how to thank your supporters? This is a new letter you can use as your own each month. Just copy and paste from the Word file.

Appeal letters, etc.: Along with our ideas on development and center growth, you may find appeal letters and other items that can be copied. Anything that can be copied is in a Word file so that you can cut and paste, just as you would with the thank you letter.

If you ever have questions regarding an issue, email them directly to me. I’m happy to help. After all, we’re in this together.
Step 3 in Pledge Fulfillment

Build the momentum: Winning updates

The first two steps to keeping our constituents on our team and reminding them to stay with us can be found in last month’s issue of The LifeTrends Connection . . .

First, S-Start with a Flourish

Second, O-On-time Correspondence

The third step polishes off our “SOW” acronym: Winning Updates. This step takes us beyond the fulfillment of pledges and into an ongoing relationship that could last for years and years.

For our purposes, “Winning Updates” means that we keep our partners apprised of our victories, give them the inside story on new initiatives and perhaps ask for their insights from time to time, involving them in appropriate ways in the decision process.

So what are some characteristics of winning updates? We have examples on the following page, but let’s use these rules of thumb in our communication:

Personal—Our updates never need to start with “Dear Friend” or “Dear Pro-Life Friend.” If you don’t know my name, we don’t yet have a friendship, right? It’s the same here. Use names in correspondence.

Brief—People don’t have time to read long letters these days. Therefore, our stories and requests need to get to the point, quickly.

Positive—We know this, but we can’t say it enough. Our glass should always be half-full (or more!). Focus on what is going right. While there are certainly times when we need to share our needs and prayer requests as challenges arise, the trend of our communication with supporters should be positive.

Visionary—A strong organization is always planning to peak in the future, so our correspondence should reflect the idea that our organization is preparing for better and better days ahead.

A quick story

When I (Kirk, your publisher) served as executive director of a pregnancy help center one of the roles I took on, because of my experience in journalism, was to write the monthly newsletter. In doing so, it was important to always remind our readers that we as an organization were moving forward, victoriously.

Our mission with the newsletter was to report our progress; not to focus on our challenges. This mission led to an interesting conversation when one of our supporters stopped me on the street and said, “Wow, so many great things are happening at the center.” Not surprisingly, this financial partner was staying faithful to us every month.

Then it hit me: This person had never been inside our center, and had no real connections to anyone who served inside the center. The only information he had was from our correspondence. And he was thrilled with our progress. The moral? Stay positive. Let constituents know we are winning. When we do this, our friends will stick with us . . . And even more victories will follow.
Three examples of winning updates . . .

While “Winning Updates” will be your own, here are a few examples of what might appear in a letter to supporters to keep these partners engaged and motivated to stay with you for a long time.

Keeping our partners apprised of our victories
Julie* is a mother of two and married; and it would have been easy to assume she would be happy about a third child when she came in our door.

She wasn’t. In fact, she told us that because her marriage was in trouble, and her best option was likely abortion. But . . .

Thirty minutes after coming in our door, Julie saw her child on the ultrasound screen. This picture of her child reminded her of two earlier ultrasounds . . . Of the two children she loves so dearly.

Julie’s future isn’t easy. She has a lot to think about and knows that she must work on her marriage. We are going to help her, and we are going to walk with Julie and her husband through the challenges ahead. After all, they now have three children to love.

Thank you for being a part of Julie’s story. Because of your support, she had the opportunity to see her child. And thanks to you, she’s choosing life.

Give the inside story on new initiatives (perhaps in an email)
Last week our board made a simple decision to alter our budget, upward; adding $25,000 for an advertising campaign to strengthen our outreach. With these funds, those who need us will easily find us on the web, when they are watching their favorite TV shows and when they go to the movies.

Our goal? We believe this plan will allow us to reach an additional 108 clients which, if current trends continue, will mean at least 96 more lives saved next year. You are making this happen. Because of your support, we are able to step out with initiatives like this which will change lives and yes, save lives, too. Thank you for your partnership; I wanted you to be one of the first to know where we are headed . . . and I look forward to sharing the results in the months ahead.

Ask for counsel and advice (another email idea)
As we look forward to a great future at First Choice, it always helps to have new ideas. With this in mind, I’d love for you to join me and our board members on either Nov. 5, 12 or 14 in the club room at Mr. Fred’s Steak House. On those evenings, we are asking you and a few other faithful partners to join us in exploring some possible new initiatives for the center.

We will meet at 6:30 and wrap things up by 8 p.m. I’d love to have you join us. Let me know if one of these nights fits for you. Dinner is on us!
Join *The Wall*; raise more funds
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At a time when our social and political structure is aligned against the most innocent among us, *The Wall* outlines a clear path to ending abortion as we know it. And this path to victory leads directly through pregnancy help centers.

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**WE want to see YOU at Institute!**

December 9-13, 2013 | Columbus, Ohio
A new idea may come from “outside”

We never know where the next great idea might come from. As I was writing this month’s issue, I spoke with a director who, for years, was looking for a new location for her center.

At some point she finally stopped, not finding any strong possibilities ... Until a local physician stopped her one day and began asking about whether she might be interested in a new home for the organization. Today, their facility is beyond anything she could have imagined, in the perfect location—thanks to the physician who asked.

What did she do right? She listened. So can we. Here is a letter or an e-blast that can open up the communication process. We never know whether, by allowing others to offer their thoughts, we might find a new key to a bright future for our center. Here is the newsletter/E blast article:

If you are reading this, you are part of the family at First Choice PCC. And at First Choice, we love to hear from family.

Today, we are beginning to shift our focus toward 2014; setting goals and considering new initiatives. As a result, we need the thoughts and ideas that only family can provide.

So let me ask you, “What would you like to see First Choice accomplish in 2014?” What are your ideas, your dreams for the future and your vision for the impact we can have on our community? The truth is, perhaps it is you who has an idea that could strengthen this center in ways we cannot imagine. Who knows?

Over the next several weeks, through November 15, we want to hear from you. Email us at info@1choice.org and send your thoughts along. Or call Emily at 000-0000 and voice your ideas.

Brainstorming together can be fun. We can’t use every idea; we all know that. But we never know when a thought might catch hold and open the door to others that can create an even brighter future for First Choice.

The truth is, we want to be everything that God has called us to be. And while our board and staff work together to seek His calling for this center, we also believe that He may use any of us in the family to bring new and powerful thinking to the table.

So feel free to give the future of First Choice your thoughts. We would love to hear from you. Perhaps the idea in the back of your mind is ready for implementation—and our clients (and their children) will be smiling as a result.
Thank you letters keep you connected to your partners

Each month, The LifeTrends Connection brings you a sample “Thank you note” to send to your supporters. October’s letter is below:

Dear George and Martha,

As we launch into Fall, (name of center) enters an interesting phase of the year where we begin looking at our goals and vision for the year to come.

This process however, would not be complete without your help. Because you support us financially, you are more than a “donor,” you are a partner in the process.

In a very real sense, you are investing in the success of this work.

With this in mind, I ask: Do you have an idea for our future? Is there an initiative you would like to see us undertake; is there a new frontier for us to consider?

You read our newsletters, you see my correspondence with you. So if you have an idea, I want you to connect with me. Just email me at myemailaddress@center.com and let me know what you are thinking. Or of course, just call me at 000-0000.

The next great idea for our future might just start with you, and I’d love to hear it. Thank you for being a key part of (name of center). Let’s make next year our best ever!

Sincerely,
CEO

2nd Letter for lapsed pledges

When the pledge is still unfulfilled

Last month we offered a “First Reminder” letter for those who have overlooked their pledges. Because of so many requests, this month we offer the “2nd Reminder” letter for those who do not respond to the first:

Dear Fred and Ethel,

Thank you again for your $25 monthly pledge to First Choice from our April 2013 fundraising dinner. Because of you and so many others, more than $128,000 was raised to build a bright future for First Choice.

Looking through our records, we have not yet seen your first gift toward this pledge. This may be as a result of a mistake on our end; such as failing to get in touch following the banquet. If this is the case you have my apologies. If I can do anything to rectify our error, please let me know.

And perhaps, this is as simple as our correspondence getting lost in the mail. That happens as well.

Or if you are like me, sometimes even with the best intentions, things simply slip through the cracks. This might have happened in this circumstance and I’ve enclosed an envelope for your convenience so that you can enclose your first monthly gift. Thank you in advance.

And if your giving plans have changed, I certainly understand. Feel free to let me know and I will make sure that our bookkeeping department is aware so that you will not receive more correspondence.

Thank you for your interest in First Choice. You are part of the family here, and we appreciate you!

Sincerely,

Lucy Ricardo, CEO

Feel free to make this letter your own. The above are some thoughts that can be fitted to your center’s narrative.
One of the challenges for non-profits and ministries is that, because we rely on funding from supporters, we sometimes settle for “good enough” in our presentation to the community we serve.

For instance, let’s consider our storefront, which serves as our first impression to our community. What does our signage in front of our office, our parking area and the entrance to our facility say about us?

As an organization, our storefront usually sends one of two messages:

A. Come inside where you will find both professionalism and excellence
B. We are doing the best we can with what we have

So how do we know whether we are on the “A” list? Here’s an idea: when you are out in the community, why not look around at various storefronts and take a quick picture of the best one you can find? Board members can designate a member to receive the photos via email and print them out. At a future board meeting, compare the photos with a photo of the center’s storefront.

Does your center compare favorably? If so, this is a pleasant reminder that our storefront is sending a positive message to prospective clients, giving us a tremendous opportunity to reach out to those who need us most. In addition, supporters and potential supporters are exponentially more likely to support a winning organization. A positive first impression as they drive by is a major step in that direction.

But what if our storefront is not up to the standard we’ve set for our center? If we are in this situation, there is no reason for frustration or despair. But because it is the board’s responsibility to make sure the tools are in place for success, the board may want to consider:

- Amending the budget to place priority on capital improvements to the storefront
- Working with the CEO to identify those who might give special gifts to fund improvements
- Brainstorming ideas on inexpensive ways to spruce up our “first impression” (Plants, paint, etc.)

Even if our storefront is up to standard, a routinely scheduled facelift is worth considering. Why?

Business professionals tell us that a company needs to consider ways to “reinvent” itself approximately every five years. It’s not a bad idea for us to do the same. A perfect place to start is outside our front door, where we make our first impression.
But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging of men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. — Acts. 8:3-4

We have heard this before, but it is important to remember that the church does its best work when it is under the most pressure. To look at this another way, God has a way of taking what appear to be terrible circumstances and turning them into victories.

In the process, God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary tasks.

In the Book of Acts we see Saul (who would later become The Apostle Paul) terrorizing the church. Can you imagine the fear these new followers of Jesus Christ were facing? They were being dragged from their homes, imprisoned for nothing more than claiming Jesus to be the messiah for whom they were waiting.

Saul put on the pressure. And the church scattered. Yet as they scattered, they “went about preaching the word.” In today’s terms, they could not shut up about Jesus. The result? The message grew and instead of shrinking, the church flourished as more and more believed in the message.

When we look at this it is perfectly appropriate for us to point out, as we did above, that God is doing a mighty work here. But let’s not forget the people of the church who said “Yes” to God and made the choice to take a dire situation and use it as an opportunity to advance the kingdom work.

What about us? We are no different than those in the early church. These weren’t “supermen” and “superwomen” carrying with them some power that we do not possess. They were ordinary people, serving an extraordinary God. And they knew it. So when the pressure came upon them, they chose to advance.

We can do the same.

When we face trials, we can choose to advance our faith.
When we face opposition, we can choose to advance our faith.
It is our choice, just like it was for those in the early church.

Today, let’s determine to advance, regardless of circumstances. When we do, ours will be a life of victory, and a life of hope. And the God who loves us, along with Jesus who we follow, will be smiling.