

THE 6TH EXTINCTION

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Have each of your senior team members come up with at least three local organizations that are engaged in conservation. If you are currently partnered with them, how can you grow that partnership? If you are not partnering, what could a win-win partnership look like? What are the unique assets your organization has that could be leveraged to advance their missions? What do they do that could help advance the aquarium or zoos mission?

“Any successful change requires a translation of ambiguous goals into concrete behaviors.” – Dan Heath

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Conservation is one of those words that means different things to different people. In our Zoo world, that definition is most frequently defined by field biologists; however, we understand that conservation is more complex and interconnected than that. Conservation can take place in so many areas, including:

- Species sustainability
- Operations & green practices
- Reintroduction of species
- Food production and use
- Composting
- Hunting & population regulation
- Recycling
- Politics and legislation
- Cultural and societal behavior
- Agricultural practices
- Public perception and policy
- Field research and in situ work

Which one(s) are you focused on? They are all valuable and need to work together if we are going to see thriving, integrated ecosystems.

It's great how much more money and resources have gone into conservation from zoos and aquariums. The next step needs to be refining our measures to make sure our efforts are having the desired impact. Dollars are important, but money contributed is not the final measure of our success. If conservation is about saving or enhancing environments, species, and more, then our measures need to reflect that. Justin Birkhoff (Cheetah Conservation Fund) mentioned a few measures like acres saved, biometrics, and species counts that may give a more accurate account of our efforts. We need to be specific in our goals. Contributing to conservation is great, but even success at that might leave many of us still desiring more. What is that "more"? What does that impact really look like?

MEASURES OF IMPACT

Zach Winfield from Zoo Advisors provided a great overview of the current trends in revenue generation for zoos and aquariums. One of these trends is the increase in offering rides, rentals, and other experience-based revenue generators. Another trend is more acquisition of off-site, large-acreage properties. Yet another is that more organizations are exploring and implementing dynamic pricing structures. Some of the most interesting aspects Zach shared were related to the increase in research and statistics to better understand our current audience and revenue opportunities. In short, we undervalue our experiences. It's important to look at enhancing and maximizing what we have already committed to – this includes the guests we have already gotten through our gates, and initiatives we have already begun within our organizations.

THE BIGGER PROBLEM

“The way to get things done is to not mind who gets the credit for doing them.” – Benjamin Jowett

GETTING CREDIT

If another organization is already doing the work, do we need to too? How can we enhance what's already being done by maximizing our unique skills? We don't often tap into the vast knowledge we have. Imagine how many degrees and years of experience we possess beyond animal fields: accounting, business operations, event planning, marketing, and more. How can we better use our skills to partner with people already doing good work? We don't need to recreate the wheel. Also, it's important to think about our motives. Are we looking to promote and be recognized as conservation leaders, or is that a byproduct of seeing more impact take place? Our desire to be recognized might accidentally distract us from the work itself, and sometimes, the negative impacts it might have on our conservation partners around the world.

Ideating is always exciting, but it's critically important that we stay true to our core mission and purpose along the way. When throwing out ideas, can we clearly communicate how these ideas advance our missions? For those of us in not-for-profit organizations, we have both a fiscal and philanthropic responsibility. That doesn't mean, however, that we need to undervalue our work. Many of our organizations are filled with incredibly passionate staff with 5 to 25 years of training, education, and experience. Our work and knowledge are worth a lot. People respect us and are on-board with our missions. The more we can leverage that trust and communal equity, the more we can grow our financial and philanthropic value. Some of the "what ifs" above may not generate millions in new revenue, but they can still positively impact our bottom line and help the natural world to thrive more. Whatever ideas or side hustles we come up with, we need to make sure they are consistent with our core mission.

BUSINESS MODEL

ECHO Digital is hosted monthly to create opportunities for passionate zoo professionals to connect with innovative ideas from outside the zoo field as well as with other zoo colleagues around the country.

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