

Valued Partners

When businesses and charities marry well



Special feature: Solving your relationship problems



20th July 2011

Solving your relationship problems

Dear Sky & Global Action Plan,

Please help! I am the director of a multi-national company and I'm looking for a new cross-sector relationship to provide some spark and excitement in my life. I want someone who shares my values and is interested in a long-term partnership, so I'm thinking of hooking up with somebody from the charity/NGO side of town. But I am a bit overwhelmed by it all. How do I know who to choose? Won't we be too different? How can I avoid a relationship disaster? You two have been together for some time, and you look happy. Can you share with me any pearls of wisdom?

*Best wishes,
A hopeful director*



Jo Fox - Director of The Bigger Picture, BSkyB



Trewin Restorick - CEO, Global Action Plan

Dear hopeful director,

You are not alone. There are a growing number of your colleagues who are looking for a fulfilling relationship with a charity partner. However, it's not easy and there will be difficulties along the way. Ultimately we feel sure that you will find a partnership fulfilling and rewarding. We've had a great time together but looking back it would have made things a lot easier if we had signed a prenup. If we had it would probably have looked something like this...



1. Searching for Mr. Right

Set out the characteristics, personality and values of your ideal partner and use these to guide you but remember to be flexible on those "nice to haves".

You need to know what you want in a relationship before you start looking for "the one". Does your shortlist include organisations that have synergy with your products, services or CSR goals? If you leave all or part of the decision-making up to your employees, make sure that the process still allows you to meet your strategic aims.

When Sky chose Global Action Plan from among 170 charities, Global Action Plan recognised an immediate opportunity to promote pro-

environmental behaviours among Sky's 16,500 employees. As one of the smaller organisations in the running for the partnership, Global Action Plan was naturally excited by the opportunity to raise their profile.

Global Action Plan gave Sky the opportunity to widen the aims of its environmental strategy among the customers and communities it serves, and also help raise the profile of the sustainability strategy within the company. It was and is a win-win situation for everyone!



2. Avoid one-night stands

Understanding each other, building trust and recognising where things will work best takes time.

In the three-year relationship between Sky and Global Action Plan, we both felt that it took six months to establish the ground rules, working relationships and joint understanding needed for a good partnership to flourish. The full benefits of our relationship were only realised once the foundations were established.

3. Get the vows right

The relationship will only work if you have a shared vision towards which you can both aspire and you speak the same language.

Businesses and NGOs are very different culturally, and that's a good thing.

This may mean that you don't set too many objectives at the start. Stick to a few that are really important. Your relationship will evolve, change and mature over time. A shared understanding of what you are working toward will keep the relationship's foundations strong, even if your picture of success changes.

4. Expect first-night nerves

Understand that new partners may be a bit in awe of each other at first and not sure what to expect. It's fine to try and please, but not if you compromise your own happiness.

Particularly where you're making financial donations to a partner, the relationship can feel unequal at first. Don't be surprised if the smaller partner finds it confusing to confront a range of teams and departments. They may even be daunted at first, and unable to show the spark you've witnessed.

It took many months before Sky and Global Action Plan were able to voice opinions and ideas with confidence. Both parties found it helpful to consult and conduct research to mediate important issues. Another lesson: a relationship counsellor can be your best friend.

5. Openness, honesty and equality is essential

Two-way communication and honest feedback are the cornerstone of a good partnership. Remember, once the communication stops, the problems start.

Once you've been together for a while, your partner's annoying habits will start to show. Things that may have seemed great at the beginning can later grate on each other's nerves. This is where openness and honesty come in.

Difficult conversations sometimes need to take place and hard things need to be said. Over time, both Global Action Plan and Sky felt more able to question, challenge and assert views. This strengthened the relationship, allowed us both to address challenges head-on, and focus both our efforts on bringing out the best of us.

6. You can offer each other more than you think

Take some time to think about what skills and resource you have available that could provide real value to your partner.

There are lots of things that businesses take for granted that NGO and third sector partners only dream of. Access to Sky's branding and marketing expertise helped energise Global Action Plan's look and feel, and gave a boost to its efforts to stand out from the crowd. It also provided a challenge to Sky's in-house designers!

Sky also offered Global Action Plan three places on the senior leadership development programme, which built the skills and capacity of the charity and changed the charity's culture, enabling them to be more responsive to business needs. In return, Global Action Plan presented leaders with a series of real challenges, forcing them to use their business skills in a new and challenging environment.

7. Keep the spark alive

Keep innovating and surprising and you'll find that the relationship works in totally unexpected ways.

Businesses and NGOs are very different culturally, and that's a good thing. It's those differences that provide the source for new ideas and the excitement to keep a partnership going. Hold steering groups, consultations and concept forums that allow you to explore new and exciting roads to follow.

One of the major surprises for Sky was when Global Action Plan helped them identify new areas to extend their corporate responsibility programme. A key success

was the high level of staff participation in the partnership projects – in particular through volunteering. These projects allowed Sky to extend its environmental and social responsibility to local communities and created new opportunities for staff development.

As more employees volunteered, awareness of the partnership grew. Employees become the champions who spread the message to their colleagues. By the end of the project 84% of employees agreed with the statement “I believe Sky is an environmentally responsible company.”

8. Don't let money get in the way

Money isn't everything but it sure does help. But put pounds aside for a partnership to thrive.

Though one partner is usually financially supporting the other, it has to be a relationship of equals rather than that of a contractor and supplier.

The true value of a partnership often isn't monetary. Global Action Plan felt that the biggest impact the relationship with Sky was to change the organisational culture in a positive way. The organisation is now much more strategically aware, has a more thorough approach to programme development, and is better at promoting itself.

9. Friends and family are important, too

A good partnership builds a bigger community for your ambitions. Make sure you talk to those around you and explore opportunities to extend your reach.

With Sky, Global Action Plan took one of their pilot programmes, Appetite for Action, to a whole new audience with an online challenge designed to get school children to think about the environmental impact

of the food they eat and what they throw away. Before the partnership, Global Action Plan engaged 12 schools in the challenge. With Sky's support, within two years the programme engaged 1800 schools in fun and practical activities.

Global Action Plan helped extend Sky's volunteer projects into local communities, an example of which is the Evergreen project with Hanover Housing Association. Evergreen provided large-scale environmental volunteering opportunities for Sky staff and the local community, while Global Action Plan worked with residents and estate management on how to implement change and enable residents to green their lifestyles.

10. Work towards a happy ending

Priorities inevitably change and there will almost certainly come a point where you will want to move on and create new relationships.

It is important to build in a soft landing for your charity partners as the relationship ends so that they can plan to avoid any income surprises.

As a direct result of the partnership, Sky helped Global Action Plan build new partnerships with other large companies including O2. Support was also given to build the capacity of the organisation, help was provided in making new corporate contacts and ongoing contract work was provided.

In summary, we feel very proud of our partnership, both in terms of what we have achieved as well as what we have learned. None of this would have been possible without us following the simple rules we've set out above so we hope you find our preup helpful.

With warm wishes,

Global Action Plan & Sky

Global Action Plan is the UK's leading environmental behaviour change organisation and, since 1993, has helped businesses, schools, and communities reduce their carbon footprint to positively impact on the environment and climate change.

For information about partnering with Global Action Plan, contact Donna McKitterick, Head of Strategy and Development: donna.mckitterick@globalactionplan.org.uk | Tel: 07825 151039

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