

## **Working with Consultants**

**John Good, International Planned Parenthood Federation**

**Lee Green, Principal & Boulder Office Lead, Redstone Strategy**

Interview 11/13/12

### **1. What resulted from the consulting project that was transformative?**

**John:** It has done two things: One is that it has heightened the understanding in the organization that performance is important. In the past the organization has implicitly thought about performance, but not as explicitly as it does now. Now there is much more explicit discussion on performance, these take place throughout the organization, trustees and management board and operational staff. This change has had been transformative. As a organization we understand that to make good decisions we must have good data. The introduction of performance based funding has been a key part on increasing focus on performance and as a result of this work; we're seeing better performance in the field, enabling the organization to delivering more services, and in turn raise more funds from donors.

**Lee:** There's a theme here; I'm repeating what John says. What's exciting about the project is that it has resulted in the change, in the culture, in a very complicated organization, with a secretariat structure, 153 member association with its own governance. Very complicated, sophisticated structure; to get it to move, it's a challenge. Our work together, under John's leadership, has changed the culture of the secretariat, focused on performance. End result: not only are we seeing performance improvement now, after our engagement because it's built in the fabric of organization, and continued to drive it. The way it was able to work we tried to be particularly sensitive to how the org worked, and there was a lot of involvement from people all over the world to help design the things we put in place, incentive structure, tools to help members to actually improve their performance. It was a lot of engagement from a lot of people. We understood that was what was needed for it to be adopted and absorbed. We had a working style that allowed for a lot of involvement, establish principles, then get into the specifics about how it would work. Principles toward common expectations.

**John:** Redstone is very good at that. They were in tune with the organization which has a complex structure as the Member Associations who make up IPPF are independent, nationally-based, grass roots organisations and it is important that any partner is culturally sensitive to this. Redstone proved very sensitive to how IPPF functioned, and they were ready to challenge us. There were other organisations doing better than us in a number of key areas, they put that on the table in a way that challenged us to do better and not be defensive. The changes we wanted were difficult for some in the organization, but Redstone were good at making IPPF

retain ownership of the project. Without this ownership the initiative was likely to fail in the long term

## **2. How was IPPF "ready" for this project?**

**John:** I started 4 years ago. We had a mid-term review, this highlighted that we've not tied our investments and outputs together. There was a need to deal with the performance culture of the organization. Hewlett offered to support us in improving the organizations performance and this was great timing. This project was ahead of the curve in the sector. Donors are now asking how the organization is delivering value for money and this and other projects really help us to demonstrate how we are achieving this.

**Lee:** It's true for any organization. For projects to succeed, particularly when you take an organization as complex as IPPF, it's really important that they're ready. External factors created a need for change. The director explained how they saw the need coming up the pike. Change shifting from the donor environment – project funding rather than general operating support. To win project funding, in a competitive environment... there were changes taking place in the external environment.

Mid-term review highlighted these issues. They had a supportive general director who backed the work. Most importantly, John has a senior leader within the organization -- the CFO was all ready to champion it. It took a lot of time. A senior champion is crucial.

## **3. Looking back, knowing what you know now, what's one thing you would have done differently?**

**John:** Overall the project went well and we had no real road blocks

Getting that internal buy-in was important and while this was achieved. Looking back, we could have done a bit more thinking about how to get internal buy-in and achieved this more quickly.

**Lee:** Central, regional offices or association members? Which level needed more buy-in?

**John:** When we introduced the programme to Member Associations they tended to raise similar concerns perhaps if we had given this more thought at the start of the programme we could have got past their concerns more quickly.

**Lee:** We got the incentive system in place, then tools. Maybe put the system and tools in place together as the first step. I struggled to think what we would've done differently... one thing was if we should have more engaged with governing council and volunteer boards. Not sure if that would have helped.

**John:** In terms of where we have ended up we have made good progress, Now we have more explicit discussions on performance, and have a dedicated working group to look at performance on our main board, in addition we publish performance data on our website. Without Redstone's work, we would not have achieved this.

**Lee:** Often when doing this type of projects, we try to get there quickly. If we had tried to drive it quickly, it wouldn't have worked so well.

**4. Assuming John has worked with consultants before, what made this partnership with Lee and Redstone different? More joyous? More impact? And, for Lee, you've worked with lots of social sector leaders, what made John stand out?**

**John:** Maybe something in the nature of the engagement. While we worked closely with Redstone, the funding is coming from Hewlett. That somehow made our relationship different. The client is not paying for the work. There's something about that. In a funny way, that's helped. Not seeing the bills.

We had different RedStone teams, working across vastly different cultures from our central office in London, to field offices in Delhi, and Nairobi and other teams working out in the field, Bangladesh. Lee in particular, showed their ability to work with very different types of people. The quality of the work, intellectual rigor, is very good. They are nice people and that helps. Get on the personal level. They genuinely want to succeed, to help our beneficiaries.

One of the things about the organization is people can be quite defensive. Lee and the team, instead of saying people defending their performance, asked them what they can do to be better. Naturally we're talking about non-profit in diverse environments where explicit discussion on performance is not the norm. The Redstone team drew solutions to the issues we faced from the organisation itself, empathizing well with those they worked with. A standard consulting approach I don't think that would work in this situation; you need to adapt to the environment.

**Lee:** More joyous! I like that. Multiple things. First IPPF as an organization is just amazing. It's an unusual org with 153 different member associations, in different countries, locally-led, indigenous, started by, led by, governed by people in those countries who want to improve the situation there. That kind of grassroots passion with local reach. That was joyous to work in those environments. They haven't thought a lot about these things. It was a good fit – we had something to contribute. It was really lucky to have that opportunity.

John's understanding of the organization and how to move. It's a complicated organization. It's big. Lot of different people in leadership roles. They are in charge of what they do. Trying to move that entire diverse body is complicated. John had an amazing sense on how to do that. He continued to be patient, to have a positive but realistic about what was possible. He acted as an incredible guide to us – in what ways to push at different points when we reached what we thought we could push. That was incredibly helpful.

**Lee:** Incite a riot!

## **5. How did you find each other?**

**John:** Hewlett was the matchmaker. They suggested Redstone. It went really well.

*Responding to the skeptic of having funders in such an active role:*

**John:** Hewlett thought performance could improve or else they wouldn't have suggested it. Appropriate? Serendipity – it came together with our recognizing the need. It was our choice to say we wanted to do it. We could have said no thanks and could have said no to the consulting team. Sometimes you need to be pragmatic. You might be right to say Hewlett Foundation could have given us the money to find our own. Hewlett was very hands off in the whole thing, which was important. Not telling us to do this or that. So the relationship was between us and RedStone. In the second phase, the Hewlett Foundation was paying, but it was our proposal in terms of where we were taking it. I have nothing but praise for Hewlett.

**Lee:** A number of risks... do have the potential to be real risks and concerns. It's quite legitimate as a concern. This is not an unusual situation for us. Hewlett or another foundation gives NGOs money for us to work with an NGO. A couple of things we do to address these concerns. We're never working with anyone who doesn't want to work with us. We have introductory conversations; if you're not interested, not a good fit, then we're happy to say "that's fine." Hewlett Foundation should pay for someone else... an organization has to want to work with us. We make it very clear to the Hewlett Foundation and NGO that the NGO is our client. We agree on a scope with client, then we send it to the Hewlett Foundation. That's true throughout. We will review the results with Hewlett Foundation, but it's screened by organization first to edit and be heavily involved. Seeing the grantee as client and not Hewlett Foundation is important.

Having Hewlett Foundation pay for it and not sending all the bills to grantees removes the issue of how much this costs... if this person comes to this meeting and not that, we can focus on doing what client and RedStone agree on how best to use resources. We focus on the bigger picture. The same theme on value for money. We've been working with IPPF on the last three years. Redstone is obsessed with providing value with money.

Redstone doesn't do any marketing. All of our projects come from people who call us and hear our work from somebody else. Given that's how we get our work, we are obsessed with making the clients happy. That's how we work. In this case, it worked well. But I can see the argument of giving money to NGO to sort out on their own.