

## **Hartz & Minds 27: T-shirt Philanthropy**

It's July. Clients are at the beach. Kids are at camp. Time to clean out the basement! This is not the forum to share my walk down memory lane, except for the one soft, overstuffed bag that inspired this issue of *Hartz & Minds*.

The last 25 years brought a veritable tsunami of charity t-shirts into my life! Despite ongoing efforts to donate some, pass others to our teenagers, and wear favorites until they disintegrate, here remains the giant Hefty bag.

### Who?

"Blue chip" company logos – Home Depot, Coca-Cola, and SunTrust – among smaller businesses of every stripe. Powerhouse nonprofits – Food Bank, Nature Conservancy, Boys & Girls Clubs – among organizations no longer with us. Private foundation and government program names too, adorn the backs of the apparel.

### When?

T-shirts came from events from galas to bowl-a-thons. They were issued for both anniversary and fundraising milestones. I found shirts for leadership positions and for donors only. Some were for all volunteers and others for all participants.

### How?

The t-shirts in my bag were purchased directly, gifted with a donation, earned based on fundraising, included with company sponsorship, allocated for a specific role in a charity or event, or presented at a specific gathering or project.

### Why t-shirts?

Setting aside our culture's penchant for "free" stuff, why do nonprofits create and distribute these items to people like me (i.e. the well clothed)? One, it works. If a walk-a-thon gives incentives for fundraising, people seem to rise to the occasion. Two, marketing. We become walking billboards for our favorite causes, spreading brand awareness. In addition, underwriters get exposure for their organizations. Three, PR. Media outlets cannot seem to get enough of the pictures and videos of groups of people, in matching outfits, working together to solve a problem. Four, logistics. Sometimes it is important to separate those who know what's going on in an event or charity from those who are volunteering or learning.

### **But, why do we covet them?**

The human need for community, affiliation, and belonging is potent. It's the low-tech equivalent of joining a Linked-In group. The human need to feel like a "good person" is also present. Wearing March of Dimes shirt broadcasts your caring about healthy babies. As well, the human need to collect things has a strange magnetism. Though the Hefty bag contained 50 wonderful charities, I was most excited to stack 20+ Hands on Atlanta Day t-shirts in chronological order.

Please keep supporting charities and their sponsors with your time and money. You might have the opportunity to say, "I saved the Giant Panda, and all I got was this incredible t-shirt!" Thank you for sharing this musing with me, Jennifer Hartz