

Seven-year old Shows How to Be an Effective Nonprofit Advocate **By: Hardy Smith**

While waiting at the airport in New Orleans following my speaking engagement at the U.S. Jaycees national convention, I was able to witness a powerful demonstration of how to be an effective advocate executed by an amazing seven-year old boy.

Adam Linebarger, who was born with spina bifida, makes frequent visits to Children's Hospital in New Orleans. He was selected by the Children's Miracle Network to represent Louisiana for a Walmart sponsored visit to Washington D.C. and a meeting with President Obama.

I watched and listened as this young dynamo sitting in a wheelchair deftly handled a television interview about his trip, his experiences at Children's Hospital, and the upcoming Miracle Network telethon.

What about Adam made him a powerful advocate for the hospital?

First, having been born with a condition that would send him on repeated visits to the hospital, Adam has a very compelling story.

Second, Adam spoke passionately about the "very nice people" at Children's Hospital and he projected a high degree of confidence in their surgical team, which he knows all too well. He gave calming reassurance to other young patients who may face medical or health challenges and assured them that Children's would take good care of them.

Third, Adam explained persuasively about the need for people to make contributions to the hospital during the telethon. He enthusiastically described what the hospital does and the benefits it offers plus the valuable ways that contributions are put to good use. With irresistible charm, Adam not only urged that checks be sent, but urged "they should be big ones so Children's can take care of everybody just like they are taking care of me."

Fourth, nonprofits must not only be able to deliver their message as effectively as this remarkable seven-year old, they must also do it frequently. To stay top-of-mind, good advocacy requires constant communication with those an organization is trying to influence and Adam is certainly a non-stop communicator!

Finally, another lesson I gained from meeting and chatting with Adam and his parents was that organizations which do a great job of delivering their services create advocates who are willing to share the positive benefits of their experiences.

Every nonprofit should be able to communicate its message as effectively as young Adam. His personality and wide beaming smile are irresistible and his passion is boundless. There is no doubt he has message points he wants to make and he makes them very clearly.

Evaluate your advocacy efforts by asking:

- How effective is your story?
- Is the public perception of your personnel one of professional competence?
- Are you able to provide a persuasive reason why potential donors will benefit by giving their financial support?
- How often is your message being heard?
- Are you prepared for an impromptu media opportunity?
- Is your customer service contributing to development of individual advocates like Adam who are out telling the world how great you are?

Follow the example set by Adam Linebarger and your nonprofit's advocacy efforts will certainly be more effective!

(As a nonprofit consultant and speaker, Hardy Smith has a proven ability for helping organizations achieve high performance success. To learn more about Hardy or to sign up for his free Tips for Nonprofit Success newsletter, please visit www.hardysmith.com)