

Pre-Mediation Assessment Report

M2/W2 ASSOCIATION RESTORATIVE CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES

Conducted by Deeper Waters Conflict Coaching

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October/November, 2012



M2W2 ASSESSMENT REPORT

BACKGROUND

In middle of October the Board Chair of M2W2 contacted Alan Simpson (Outreach Canada) to initiate a conversation about assisting the Board with a group mediation. It was understood that several mediators were being considered to assist the agency. Several emails and phone calls over the next couple of weeks resulted in the Board engaging me to conduct an assessment to determine the potential for mediation. An agreement letter detailing the level of requested assistance was created, adjusted and finally signed by the Board chair, the Executive Director and Alan Simpson on November 14.

The primary intent of the agreement was to assess the readiness for proceeding with facilitated conversation and/or mediation between individuals and groups at the staff and board level of the M2W2 agency. It was agreed that the staff would be interviewed individually and the board would be assessed as a group with opportunity for the board to contribute individually in writing if necessary.

The following report reflects the general findings about the readiness of the participants to engage in facilitated conversations regarding the ongoing negative conflict affecting their ability to serve the agency. The report also makes some recommendations for follow-up facilitated conversations. It is not the intention of this assessment report to place blame or assign responsibility for the current condition of the relationship between the board and staff. It is the intention to highlight some problematic elements that have contributed to the conflict and direct the group's attention towards a redemptive and godly response.

The biblical mandate for doing the hard work of responding to negative conflict in a redemptive and godly manner can be drawn from Roman 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

COMPONENTS

- Interviewed eight staff members (Nov 6, 16)
- Assessed the board at two board meetings (Nov 6, 14)
- Received and reviewed relevant documents
 - Constitution and By-Laws
 - Board Manual
 - Submitted Correspondence
- Perused the M2W2 web site
- Presented a verbal and written report back to the board (Nov 20)

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OBSERVATIONS

1. M2W2 is a highly valued ministry/agency contributing to the needs of the “least of these”
2. The agency has a great donor/support/volunteer base that is worth honoring and supporting
3. The staff team is fragile and generally supportive of each other and the Executive Director
4. The board is generally functional and in need of clarity, training and encouragement
5. The Executive Director is dedicated to the cause of M2W2 and requires ongoing assistance to further develop its potential and design a pathway forward with the Board
6. The prevailing conflict is about decision making processes, the use of leadership authority/responsibility and communication between the Board and the Executive Director
7. Several sources of the current crisis were identified
 - a. The previous financial deficit and the miscommunication around potential options
 - b. The process and impact of ending some staff members positions
 - c. The confusion about reducing the pay and position of the Executive Director
 - d. The ineffective and sometimes damaging communication between the Board and Executive Director
 - e. The protracted nature of unresolved negative conflict between the Board and Staff
 - f. The lack of awareness, agreement and mutual commitment to a way of managing the agency (the application of the Board Manual, its policy and procedures)
 - g. A difference in the approach to organizational management and the issues around authority/responsibility in a ministry/agency at the board and leadership levels
8. The level of the conflict can be described as a “contest” (win/lose) with some harmful elements between board and staff members and some leakage into the whole agency
9. There is a level of dissatisfaction in the performance of the Executive Director by the board
10. There is also a level of dissatisfaction in the performance of the board by most staff
11. There is a great need to shift from an adversarial approach towards a cooperative/collaborative approach to the current conflict crisis for the sake of the agency
12. There is a great need to shift the focus from who is too blame towards what can we contribute towards solving our impasse so that the agency can thrive
13. The working relationship between the board chair and the executive director is the primary place of influence for repair and renewal between the board and staff
14. The Board and Executive Director have demonstrated a willingness to adjust their past decisions and commit to working on the current conflict crisis through facilitated conversations

RECOMMENDATIONS

It was determined in the brief interviews and group assessment that there is a willingness to engage in a mediated process to talk about the working relationship between the Executive Director and Board members. There is also a desire on staff to proceed with a mediated process to talk through past issues.

However, the difficult work of collaborative conflict resolution requires an immediate large amount of time and effort. The cost of facilitating the process and the personal energy required to engage in the process is a great deal to ask of the participants and the agency. If the agency (including staff and board) can find a common and higher value in the process they might be able to proceed with the facilitated conversation. The good news is that all the participants in the assessment identified their common interest as a desire to see M2W2 continue to prosper for the sake of the inmates, volunteers and supporters. This might be your best anchor for proceeding.

Two hurdles to overcome before entering the process will be rebuilding trust and moving away from an adversarial and accusatory posture. This is the hopeful path for building a cooperative workable solution. There have been some signs of this movement in recent days.

M2W2 board (including the executive director) has a dilemma that requires a collective effort to solve. The board cannot continue in the same patterns of dysfunction without causing increasing damage to the whole agency. Yet, it appears that the board is not quite ready or able to work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency. Some crucial questions must be asked before proceeding with facilitated conversations:

1. What can we do to create a climate of honor and respect so that you can serve each other and the agency under your care?
2. What is my personal contribution into the organizational and relational dysfunctions?
3. How will we know when we are willing and able to do the hard work of collaborative conflict resolution?

There is the danger in seeking a quick fix for this current crisis due to financial restraints and the prolonged organizational dysfunction. When the board decides to move forward in a collaborative manner the following pathway might assist your agency.

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SUGGESTED PATHWAY FOR FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS (MEDIATION)

1. Arrange facilitated conversations with a trained external third party mediator/facilitator between the following participants:
 - a. The Board Chair and Executive Director
 - b. Executive Director and other individual board members (offered to all)
 - c. Executive Director and the Board as a group
 - d. The Staff team and the Board as a group
 - e. Some individual Staff and the Board
2. Contact previous staff members and/or board members to determine the need for repair and/or restoration
3. Be prepared to spend 30 to 40 hours in facilitated conversations with the board and staff
4. Review the assessment findings and decide what else can be done to create an environment of honor and respect
5. Do a deeper assessment in the agency for greater organizational health and ministry effectiveness at the board and staff level
6. Provide ongoing training and coaching in communication and conflict management for all board and staff members
7. Provide training in biblical peacemaking for the executive director and board and agree to practicing personal peacemaking as described in the board manual

Some steps for reconciling differences that have caused relational and functional damage:

1. **Rebuild trust** through actively engaging in transparent conversations that allow every member the opportunity to describe the impact of past failures in their working relationships.
2. **Resolve issues** that have become barriers to healthy organizational effectiveness and issues between people that are preventing harmonious working relationships.
3. **Repair hearts** through acknowledgement, apology, asking and accepting forgiveness and making amends.
4. **Restore relationships** through establishing new norms for the working environment, healthy communication and ongoing conflict resolution.