

Re-Energizing a Friends Group with Pat Wagner

**Re-Energizing
Friends Group**

Panhandle Library Access Network, Inc.

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Outcomes

- **Evaluate activities for their contributions to the library.**
- **Develop a recruitment strategy for new volunteers and leadership.**
- **Find out what other successful library Friends groups are doing right.**

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Key Idea #1

**Gardens need
constant care.
Friends groups do too.**

That includes weeding.

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Key Idea #2

Organizations, such as Friends, have life cycles.

nonprofitlifecycles.com

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Key Idea #3

Society, culture, and technology are changing. Always.

What worked yesterday might not work tomorrow.

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Key Idea #4

The *key asset* of any Friends group are the *people*.

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Key Idea #5

**The *key challenge*
of any Friends group
are the *people*.**

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Key Idea #6

**Are change, recruitment,
term limitations, and
growth built into the
by-laws and culture?**

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Key Idea #7

No silver bullets

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Caveat

Friends groups are independent 501c3 nonprofit corporations, not extensions of the library or other tax-supported agencies.

So, who has the legal authority to make changes?

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Agenda

- **Basic Tweaks**
- **Symptoms of decline**
- **Pulling the plug on a rescue**
- **Worst case: Replacing leaders**
- **Short-term first aid**
- **Long-term repair**
- **Resources**

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Basic Tweaks

**Sometimes,
all that is needed
is a tweak.**

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Basic Tweaks

- **Update relationship with library
Meeting with director and board**
- **New brochures for library lobby?**
- **Update website**
- **Update volunteer list:
Call/email individuals**
- **One thing to fix book sale**

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Basic Tweaks

- **Thirty-day board operations plan: 3 goals**
- **Everyone bring a new friend.**
- **Eliminate one thing to make room for
one new thing.**
- **One new program or event**
- **The nonprofit board fund-raiser test":
Can every member ask ten friends for a
donation?**

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Symptoms of Decline

- **One person does it all; resists help.**
- **Book sale committee = closed club**
- **Stable has become static.**
Resistance to new ideas
Only program is in-person book sales
- **Falling numbers and profits**
- **Sloppy bookkeeping and reporting**

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Symptoms of Decline

- **Ancient brochures and website**
- **Deteriorating relationship with library**
Poor communication among leaders
Blaming the library or community
Badmouthing library to the media
- **Not relevant to library or community**
- **New people are not welcomed.**

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Typical Friends board issues

- **No by-laws or strategic plan**
- **No written agreements with library**
- **No regularly scheduled meetings with the public and the library board**
- **No posted agenda or calendars**
- **Not following *Open Meeting* guidelines**
- **Unilateral decisions by one person**
- **Chronic conflicts among board members**

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Catalysts for the Decline

- **Main person leaves; no successor**
- **Introduction of *"loose cannon"***
- **Local economic challenges**
- **Competition from other events**
- **Change in library's strategic plan**
- **New library director and/or trustees**

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Catalysts for the Decline

- **Change in library's governing board**
- **Competition from bookstores**
- **Library *"kicks out"* book sale/store**
- **Library *"takes over"* book sale/store**
- **Change in community demographics**
- **New building – no room for book sale**

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Most common reason people leave

Volunteers, including board members, customers, contributors, and library leaders, are taken for granted.

No thank-you cards, public acknowledgment of contributions, or everyday validations.

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The Phoenix Principle

Sometimes, it's better to let the current Friends die—or put on hold—and then resurrect it with new people and resources.

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Reasons to Let It Pass Away

- **You have no legal authority.**
- **Change triggers expensive legal fight.**
- **You don't have support inside.**
- **You don't have support outside.**
- **You don't know the whole story.**
- **You don't want to take sides.**
- **You don't have time to follow thru.**

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Pat's Advice

**It's easier to replace leaders
than to change how they
think, decide, and act.**

**And, leadership is
not a job for life.**

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Why Change Even Good Leaders

- **See and hear with fresh eyes and ears.**
Not tied to old methods
- **Minimal baggage from past mistakes**
- **New relations with new cohorts**
Bring new people with them.
- **Evaluate old programming.**
- **Fresh start with the library**
- **Make room for new supporters**

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Checklist

- **Will a change make a difference?**
- **No shaming, public or private**
- **Have a caring team in place:**
Help them save face
- **What about retribution?**
Passwords, keys, "denouncing"
- **Prepare for loss of members and supporters as people take sides.**

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The Bistro Cure

In the months following 9/11, dozens of chain restaurants were near collapse. The ones that survived?

- 1. They ruthlessly cut back on their menus.**
- 2. Then, they innovated with new items and services, but not to previous levels.**
- 3. Result: Smaller menu, changed more often, higher quality, more innovative.**

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Caveat

There is no better predictably successful intervention than one-on-one conversations with stakeholders.

Shortcuts tend not to work.

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Contact Your Customers

- **The library board and director**
- **The core constituencies**
- **The most likely demographic cohorts**
- **And your invisible customers:**
 - **The ones who stopped volunteering for the Friends and attending their events.**
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The Hurricane Andrew Lesson

Buildings are more likely to survive a hurricane if they are built to code.

The same idea applies to Friends groups.

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The Fundamentals

- **Up-to-date state and federal tax status**
- **Strategic plan: Your community contract**
- **Core team: Energy and focus**
- **Current board by-laws: Simple and effective**
- **Job descriptions for board and volunteers**
- **Written guidelines for library relationship**
- **Written guidelines for foundation relationship**
- **Active recruiting of strategic partners**

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Caveat

**If the plan is
in your head,
there is no plan.**

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Resources

- **United for Libraries/ALA**
Association of Library Trustees,
Advocates, Friends, and Foundations
www.ala.org/united/
- **Wiley Essential Texts**
Essential Texts for Nonprofit &
Public Leadership & Management Series
www.wiley.com

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