

echo

Ideas that Resonate

THE SIDE HUSTLE

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Gather some of your staff for a 90-minute conversation. Give everyone a stack of Post-It notes and ask them to answer the following questions:

- What are we, as an organization, good at?
- What is your team really good at?
- What are you personally really good at in your role?

After each question, have them stick their answers on a big table or wall. Group similar responses together. You may have repeat answers across the questions, and that's OK. Looking at the key groupings of values, begin to brainstorm ways these could be turned into side hustles. All ideas are good ideas at this stage. See if any are worth exploring further!

JUST **1** GIVE IT A TRY

It's becoming more common to see organizations testing out value-added ideas while still maintaining their core competencies. Damian Carrillo, design technology manager with GLMV, shared his experience with this practice while working for Koch Industries, the second largest private company in the U.S. Damian asserted that Koch reached this size because they were not afraid to fail: "They understood the value proposition, put together a thoughtful plan, and then waited to see what happened." That company has had many failures over the years, but they have also had some of the most significant business successes in the world. We can't be afraid to dream and imagine possibilities and try out a few of them.

Damian's experience recalled us to this question multiple times: As zoos and aquariums, what are we good at? Our straight-forward values include conservation and animal care, event hosting and connecting people to animals. But what about some of the other things we are good at? Those we don't necessarily think of as value propositions? Some of the ideas our group explored included: our ability to manage and move large crowds of people; crafting experiences; animal training; education and learning experiences; veterinary care and exotic animal research; reaching under-served audiences; and being uniquely positioned to reach a diverse audience. The question, then, is how can these skills and knowledge bases be turned into added value?

WHAT **2** ARE WE GOOD AT

Zach Winfield from Zoo Advisors provided a great overview of the current trends in revenue generation for zoos and aquariums. One of these trends is the increase in offering rides, rentals, and other experience-based revenue generators. Another trend is more acquisition of off-site, large-acreage properties. Yet another is that more organizations are exploring and implementing dynamic pricing structures. Some of the most interesting aspects Zach shared were related to the increase in research and statistics to better understand our current audience and revenue opportunities. In short, we undervalue our experiences. It's important to look at enhancing and maximizing what we have already committed to – this includes the guests we have already gotten through our gates, and initiatives we have already begun within our organizations.

MAX
WHAT
YOU
HAVE

SIDE
HUSTLE
IDEAS

We love the “what if” questions at GLMV. Throughout our conversation, our group unearthed some truly creative ideas using this approach. These included: What if we ran animal- or conservation-centric events off-site for large corporate or community groups? What if we offered dog training from professional animal care staff? What if we offered Human Education programming to schools, communities, and businesses? What if we had glamping experiences at our facilities? What if polling organizations could rent space within our facility? What if we had our own plant nurseries or even did sustainable landscape design? What if we offered consulting for sustainable operations and leadership training, like Denver Zoo? What if we taught people how to create urban habitats? What if we sold landscaping resources like compost, plant materials, etc.? What if we looked at housing or hotel options as part of our offerings?

Ideating is always exciting, but it's critically important that we stay true to our core mission and purpose along the way. When throwing out ideas, can we clearly communicate how these ideas advance our missions? For those of us in not-for-profit organizations, we have both a fiscal and philanthropic responsibility. That doesn't mean, however, that we need to undervalue our work. Many of our organizations are filled with incredibly passionate staff with 5 to 25 years of training, education, and experience. Our work and knowledge are worth a lot. People respect us and are on-board with our missions. The more we can leverage that trust and communal equity, the more we can grow our financial and philanthropic value. Some of the “what ifs” above may not generate millions in new revenue, but they can still positively impact our bottom line and help the natural world to thrive more. Whatever ideas or side hustles we come up with, we need to make sure they are consistent with our core mission.

STAY
ON YOUR
MISSION

ECHO Digital is hosted monthly to create opportunities for passionate zoo professionals to connect with innovative ideas from outside the zoo field as well as with other zoo colleagues around the country.

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