

# **Getting Out of the Blood Business and into the Life Business**

*By*

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## **About the Authors**

*NextLevel Thinking ([www.yournextlevel.cc](http://www.yournextlevel.cc)) worked with The Harris County Medical Society and the five blood collecting organizations (Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center, The Methodist Hospital, St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston) to develop a comprehensive strategy that would permanently increase the blood supply in the Gulf Coast region.*

The Harris County Medical Society and the five blood collecting organizations (*Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center, The Methodist Hospital, St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital, The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston*) got together to develop a plan that would permanently increase the blood supply in the Gulf Coast region.

The quest for a marketing strategy began with a series of nine focus groups conducted in Houston, Texas among donors and non-donors. The breakout was as follows:

- Hispanic Females, 25-45 years of age
- African-American Females, 25-45 years of age
- Anglo Females, 25-45 years of age
- Hispanic Males, 25-45 years of age
- African-American Males, 25-45 years of age
- Anglo Males, 25-45 years of age
- Dormant Donors – have not donated in 2001 or 2002
- Infrequent Donors – donated 1-2 times in past 12 months
- Frequent Donors – donated 3-6 times in past 12 months

Additional analysis was done to study the experience that a donor has when they come to a mobile or permanent facility to donate blood. The following was learned as a result of this analysis:

- Approximately 70% of donors give blood **only one time** and approximately 87% give **two times or less** in a year.
- Donors see **people** when they donate blood instead of concentrating on the actual process.
- Donors see a **bigger world picture** instead of inconvenience.
- Donors see **themselves** making a difference versus seeing others carrying this burden.
- The experience of donating blood can be described as **clinical**. It is actually not a bad experience, but it is not a good experience either. In order to attract new donors and retain existing donors, the experience must be a good one – less clinical and more emotional.

Once a foundation of knowledge was established based on the analysis described above, the terms “Doer” and “Woulder” were developed to better illustrate the mindset of our potential donor market. A “Doer” is someone that donates blood regularly and is very knowledgeable about the benefits that it provides to the community. A “Woulder” can be defined either as someone that has donated blood in the past and would certainly donate again if asked, or someone that has not donated blood in the past but would do so if asked. Most of the progress toward our goal is going to come from the “Woulder” group. In fact, the objective of the marketing strategy is to remind the “Woulders” to do and the “Doers” to do again. This can be accomplished by creating a donor experience that is warm and committed and fosters never-ending support.

The focal point of our strategy is asking donors and potential donors to make a commitment to donating blood on a regular basis. This focus should not be thought of as a tagline or a campaign, but a point of differentiation and a new way of doing business. It should be imbedded in the culture of your organization. In fact, it should mean something to Donors, Recipients, Employees and Volunteers – Our Hero Quadrants. In fact, specific programs will be developed for each group to ensure that this happens. All it takes are the following three steps:

- **Donate blood one time per quarter** – it is important to understand that donating one time per quarter is different than donating four times per year. There is no end to donating one time per quarter.
- **Allow us to contact you** – we are going to ask the donors to tell us how they would like to be contacted, via email, phone or regular mail. This is an important step because it is our intention to establish a dialogue with our donors in order to increase the frequency.
- **Spread the word** – we are going to ask donors to spread the word about all the positives regarding the donation of blood and we are going to reward them for doing so.

A donor life cycle was created in order to illustrate how the objective of permanently increasing the blood supply in the Gulf Coast region is going to be achieved. The four components of the donor life cycle are **Awareness**, **Experience**, **Recognition**, and **Retention**.

**Awareness** in this case is not just trying to create an understanding of the need for blood. The real objective here is to try and create a familiarity with what it means to donate regularly. When creating awareness, it is important that our message is emotional, heard by a large portion of our target audience (Reach) enough times (Frequency) that it reminds them to donate blood at least once a quarter.

The **Experience** of donating blood must be uplifting and educational. Imagine walking in to donate blood and you are greeted by a volunteer that is assigned to take care of you. As you walk through the process, there is signage, brochures, and multimedia designed to educate you about your blood donation and what it means to donate on a regular basis. All the while, your volunteer is with you setting expectations and making sure that your experience is a good one. When it is time to leave, you will be asked to sign up to donate once a quarter and to schedule your next appointment

**Recognition** needs to come in the form of applause and appreciation. The four quadrants that were discussed earlier, Donors, Recipients, Employees and Volunteers, will all be a part of the recognition program. Recognition programs will be designed specifically for each group. The year will culminate with a “Life Gala” where applause and appreciation is given to those individuals that best personify what it means to participate in this program.

The previous three steps are very important parts of the donor life cycle. Last, and certainly not least, is **Retention**. The name of the game is to get our existing donors, as well as new donors, to donate with more frequency. The direct emotional appeal of the Donor Retention Program is designed to do just that. As mentioned earlier, before the donor leaves, we are going to ask them to commit to donating once a quarter, if they have not already done so, and schedule their next appointment. As their next appointment nears, we will contact them to remind them of the date and time of their donation. The cycle then starts over and before long we will have a very large group of individuals that understand what it means to be in partnership with us in the Life Business.