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Media Project: Natural Disaster Victims

On October 18th in *The New York Times* article “After the Hurricane, ‘the Only Shelter We Have’ by Azam Ahmed, the destruction and devastation of Hurricane Matthew is discussed in detail and how the locals reacted as well. The article began with a description of how the only safe place for residents of Lacadonie, Haiti to stay during the storm was a cave. In recent history Haiti, has been battered by storms first beginning in 2010 with an earthquake which was followed up with a hurricane shortly after. After each of these catastrophes the media has covered them projecting the truth on how devastating the storms were and how much relief help is needed. The true devastation could be captured with a single quote from a young boy who said, “We cannot go to school and it will be years before we can rebuild our homes to what they once were” (Ahmed A5). By saying this, the boy opened up a new take on how important relief efforts really are, but at the same time made it seem doubtful that anything would be done. Even though the media presents the issue of relief as something the red cross does best the boy did shed light on a truth that is hardly known.

In a report done by *NPR* titled “Report: Red Cross Spent 25 Percent Of Haiti Donations On Internal Expenses” written by Laura Sullivan, it was discovered that 25 percent of all the donations for Haiti were spent on internal expenses. Of 488 million dollars in donations the Red Cross spent nearly 125 million on its own internal expenses, and to make matters worse the organization lied about how much had been spent internally. When congressional investigators asked about the money spent on program expenses the Red Cross disclosed that 70 million dollars were spent internally. Later after further investigation that had been proven false and that the Red Cross had actually spent an additional 55 million dollars than they had released. In the report that was released the most shocking evidence was found in a quote about the organizations ethics unit calling it, “severely undermanned and underfunded” and that the Red Cross, “appears to be reluctant to support the very unit that is designed to police wrongdoing within the organization.” To me this was extremely shocking to find out as the Red Cross is one of the largest and well known relief organizations in the United States.

In another article published by *Red Cross* titled “The Real Story of the 6 Homes in Haiti: Answering Your Questions” written by David Meltzer, the story of what happened in Haiti is told in full truth. Of the 488 million dollars raised for the relief from the earthquake in 2010 only 173 million dollars went toward the reconstruction of shelter and with the 173 million dollars only 6 homes were built.

In addition to only 6 homes being built, most of the relief work done or claimed to have been done by the Red Cross was actually done by outside organizations. Going back to the *NPR* article it was found that after spending 25 percent of all proceeds internally, the Red Cross then donated a large sum of money to other nonprofit organizations. Some of these outside organizations then took up to 11 percent for organizational expenses.

Taking all of this into consideration there is a lack of leadership in the world of disaster recovery that needs to be solved. In an article by *Nonprofit Answer Guide* titled “What Does an Effective Nonprofit Leader Look Like?” one of the main focal points on nonprofit leadership is that the best nonprofit leaders must be trustworthy. Based on the article and readings done in class the type of leadership that the Red Cross needs is ethical leadership.

Applying my own leadership theory to the issue I believe that it is necessary for an organization to come into the spotlight after the next natural disaster and seek to improve the world and not create an empire. If an organization were to do so they must look to serve others selflessly and ethically as well. I believe the ideal organization would not have t-shirts for any of the members who go to help rebuild homes or deliver meals to those in need. The reason behind not giving out t-shirts would be to give back more to the communities that have been struck by natural disaster. T-shirts on average cost between 10-15 dollars to purchase and with the amount of money necessary to obtain these another family could be fed that might not have gotten food otherwise. To continue, an organization that seeks to be selfless wouldn’t need a way to prove that they were helping in a disaster struck area other than just showing up. Organizations that provide t-shirts to all members do so to promote their own organizations and waste large sums of money that could be spent to improve living conditions for people in need.

The next aspect of my leadership theory that I find necessary for an organization to thrive in disaster relief is that the organization must be ethical. In addition to being selfless an ethical organization would have a leader at the top who does not take money from the organization or spend money internally. Even though an organization that will be capable of this may never exist, if a leader of an organization does decide to be an example and not take money from the donations they receive it could prove to be the most successful relief organization.

Next I believe that for this organization to be successful they must be an organization that holds Christian values. Utilizing Christian values and holding true to them would allow the organization to thrive as it would have a clear set of rules and expectations to help guide the organization forward. In addition to holding true to these Christian values the organization would have a strong appeal to the Christian community being one that goes out of its way to give to the community as much as possible.

Comparing the situation within the Red Cross to my own personal leadership style I find that many of these aspects are missing. To begin, the first and most obvious deviation is to serve others selflessly. As written about above the Red Cross did not do much work itself but rather passed the work off to other organizations but kept a large sum of the money. This demonstrated that the Red Cross itself wanted to take credit for work that it did not do while at the same time benefitting from it. Along with the glorification of itself, the Red Cross does advertise itself wherever it goes. I find this completely unnecessary as they are known throughout the United States and even most of the world. An organization like itself has no need to advertise itself through specialized vans or giving out t-shirts to volunteers.

The second way that the Red Cross fails to demonstrate proper leadership was that they cut their own ethics divisions. By doing this the Red Cross knew that they would be taking money and spending it on causes that were going to be all right legally and ethically. Because of the way that the organization is structured and the lack of the ethics division in the Red Cross it was set in a way that the people in power could take money from the organization freely. Most people who volunteer through the Red Cross do not question what they are doing and devote themselves selflessly to the cause which is great, but the organization itself does not do this for the people that help it function.

Lastly the Red Cross did not display the Christian values necessary to be successful with disaster relief in Haiti. The Red Cross avoided the glorification of God and of his people in their attempt to help people in Haiti, but instead was caught in the act of self-glorification and greed. Because of this the efforts made in Haiti were well below the expectation for an organization with the funds and size of the Red Cross as only 6 homes were built after the disaster.

In the future, the Red Cross should seek to conform to this leadership theory by first electing a Christian leader who has proven repeatedly that they are selfless, display Christian values, and are ethical. By doing so the new leader of the Red Cross would be able to restructure the organization in a fail proof way to allow it to serve the world more than ever.

In addition to electing a Christian leader the Red Cross must look to provide more permanent solutions in disaster prone areas. In Haiti, for example, it would be largely beneficial for the Red Cross to build large, but strong structures that are capable of housing multiple families. These structures do not need to be complex even if that means just an empty room with a roof over it, but providing a safe shelter that will stand strong during and after a storm will be beneficial as family’s lives will not necessarily be ruined. During Hurricane Matthew, most families lost their homes because they were living in weak structures that were mostly made by the people who lived in them. Because of this these families had to seek shelter in a cave during the storm to remain safe. Permanent solutions offer much larger benefits than simply keeping families lives together, but they also offer a solution so that Haiti itself is not always in a constant relief effort. On top of the external benefits, the Red Cross would in return have more money to give elsewhere in the world and attempt to solve other global issues that are more profound such as providing food to try and end world hunger.

In conclusion, the Red Cross has made a very large and impactful mistake in Haiti that many people do not know about yet. This mistake has led to greed and unethical priorities of one of the world’s largest nonprofit organizations and requires immediate fixing. The best solution for the Red Cross it to look for a new leader who holds true to ethical Christian values and selfless service to God and his people. By doing this the outcome will be tremendous stemming from permanent solutions to the ability to combat other world problems such as hunger. Next time you donate ask yourself if you agree with what the organization has been known to do in order to not only stop corruption, but to promote those beliefs and values.

Works Cited

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