

# PRNews

## How the Co-Founder of 9/11 Day Learned to Trust His Gut

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Each year, PR News recognizes the leaders and campaigns creating the most social good at our CSR & Nonprofit awards luncheon. The 2019 event, hosted at the the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., saw nearly 300 top communicators celebrate their colleagues accomplishments in making the world a better place.

Keynoter Jay Winuk, President of Winuk Communications, Inc. and co-founder of the 9/11 National Day of Service and MyGoodDeed, told an impassioned story about why he started the nonprofit after losing his brother, Glenn, on 9/11.

Winuk also recalled his first conference for 9/11 Day, held just down the hall from our awards luncheon in a packed press club breakout room. Winuk was nervous that promoting the day could come off as opportunistic, and the fact that the press club room was packed full of reporters and cameramen didn't help. But upon realizing that his 9/11 Day would be well-received, Winuk had an epiphany.

"Don't be afraid to go with your gut," he told the crowd. "We set this dream in place, with the goal line far, far ahead of us, talked with many 9/11 family members to ensure their comfort with the idea, did some initial research, and then we *just went for it*. It was too important not to try. "

Launching 9/11 Day and MyGoodDeed also taught Winuk several lessons for nonprofits to take home.

### **Treat it Like a Business**

Winuk emphasized that charitable and cause-related initiatives, no matter how small or large the organizing entity, need to be treated and run like a *business*.

"I've seen too many well-intentioned nonprofits either stall or fail because they *did not* do the marketing, *did not* have the fiscal acumen, *did not* staff properly, or *did not* do the sustained research to take a good idea, and optimize and mechanize it for the future to ensure success," he said.

### **Be Adaptable**

Winuk also emphasized that nonprofits need to be incredibly adaptable, continuously assessing what's working and what's not, then adjusting their strategy accordingly. He explained that 9/11 Day's accompanying program was originally to be called "One Day's Pay", referring a day of service.

"That was restrictive, and off message," he said. "It was never about money, it was about service. So a few years into our work we changed the organizational name of our 501(3) to MyGoodDeed. And that made all the difference in our branding, in attracting participation and in potential sponsors' understanding of what we were all about. People responded to "the ask" far more favorably."



### **Capitalize on the Unplanned**

After founding 9/11 Day and MyGoodDeed with cofounder David Paine, Winuk also realized that the perfect opportunity or partnership can pass you by if you aren't paying close attention.

"You really need to pay attention when certain people and opportunities unexpectedly cross your path. And you need to jump in," Winuk said. "Sometimes it's just a matter of really living your life with your eyes open for possibilities. But you must also have a willingness to *act*, even if you're unsure at the outset about how to get to the goal line, as we were."

"As much as we think we're all in control, there's plenty over which we have no control," continued Winuk. "We just don't, right? But how we navigate the unexpected challenges and adversity, as well as the unexpected good fortunes that may come our way -- how we recognize, assess the impact and take action when faced with those surprises -- well, to me, that's what determines how well and interesting and successful our lives will unfold, both professionally and personally."

