How to run your organization into oblivion

About a decade ago, I was on the board of a small nonprofit that provided educational programming. I lasted all of a few months since I was fighting a losing battle with the other board members and a spectacularly uninformed (and very young) executive director.

This nonprofit had very little money but insisted on a color brochure printed on heavy paper, listing their courses. The ED would then mail it first class (read, the expensive way) because it would take too long to prepare it for the cheaper, bulk/nonprofit rate.

Among the things I suggested was to print the brochure on cheaper paper (like newsprint), use the bulk rate, and to consider going all electronic instead. All these ideas were dismissed. One board member thought it was crucial to print the brochure on good paper because it made it seem more serious (?). The ED was balking at using the bulk rate because it meant pre-sorting the brochure. And another board member said that many people wanted the printed brochure and would never abide an electronic format.

Like I said, it was a losing battle and I believe that there's no sense in discussing change with people who don't want to change.

Here we are a good ten years later, and I just got their latest brochure. Yes, I am still on the mailing list even though I have not signed up for a class or donated any money or shown any interest whatsoever. It is still printed on heavy paper, and has full color (which adds to the expense). They are now using the nonprofit/bulk rate. When you use use the bulk rate, you have to be aware that delivery will take longer

than using first class postage. Apparently, it is not something that this nonprofit understands. I got the brochure yesterday (May 10). The front cover has a banner telling me spring classes begin on April 26, 2017.

This nonprofit continues to print an expensive brochure. However, it doesn't print it out with enough lead time to be able to overcome the slower bulk delivery rate. In effect, this is a complete waste. If you are using a brochure as your only means to communicate your offering, then it better be timely.

And, it seems this organization does not review its database. It continues sending out brochures to people that have not indicated any interest in years. Of course, this adds to the cost of the printing and mailing.

Can you imagine if they had provided this brochure electronically? They would be able to send it out at precisely the right time. They would be able to gauge interest from the open and click rates. They would be able to scrub their lists of any bad addresses. They would increase their reach through the ability to share online. But why change?

Here's how you run your organization to the ground: you waste your precious resources and keep doing it until you have nothing left. You keep doing things the way you always have even though it has never been cost-effective. You don't adapt.

Sigh.