September 11, 2013

To: AE911Truth Board of directors
        AE911Truth staff, volunteers, and donors
        Members of other 9/11 Truth movement organizations

This is an overarching analysis by a former insider at Architects & Engineers for 9/11 Truth ("AE911Truth") that describes how AE911Truth could best achieve its mission by making the changes proposed in this document. This one page summary is followed by a basic Analysis and for those who are most interested, by a more in depth description of proposed organizational and operational changes. I welcome your comments on this document.

My intention behind this analysis is to help AE911Truth and every organization and individual in the 9/11 Truth movement to be able to organize with maximum efficiency.

Richard Gage has done a lot for AE911Truth and the 9/11 Truth movement. The petition and the website have brought credibility. But decisions Gage has made or failed to make are hurting AE911Truth and limiting its productivity despite significant financial resources. My analysis deals with eight problem areas in the structure and the day to day operations of AE911Truth.

You may find reading this feels like work. If so, I have to admit that it is precisely what I ask of you. Changing this organization that we all want to succeed and that we have all supported will be work. No one person can do this alone but together we can. After all we have already committed to changing the way Americans see 9/11 and changing the war policies that were sparked by 9/11. Haven't we? Compared to that the challenge before us - of changing AE911Truth - should be a piece of cake. Kindly help me with this task. Then later we can reward ourselves with some reading for entertainment!

The subject areas covered are:
1) Project plans
2) Mission and strategic planning
3) Writing and editing in a group
4) Decision making
5) Conference calls / meetings
6) Organizational structure
7) Leadership experience and skills of the CEO
8) Learning from experience

Suggested action steps for the reader are offered at the end of the basic Analysis. If you agree with my recommendations you could write to the AE911Truth Board: board [at]ae911truth[.] org

Michael Armenia's book is cited in the basic Analysis in Part II. Armenia was an AE911Truth Volunteer, Board member and Volunteer Team Leader in 2008 and 2009. After resigning in November 2009 he wrote a book about what he saw, experienced and learned at AE911Truth.
Cordially,
Mark Graham

Part II – basic Analysis

In Part II each topic is analyzed in terms of AE911Truth's current practice, problem, and recommendation. Part III provides details on how proposed organizational and operation changes could be made most effectively.

Project plans

". . . there was no project management, a common theme throughout the organization."
(Nanomanagement: The Disintegration of a Non-Profit Corporation , by Michael Armenia**,**
p. 73. You can find this book online.**)**

". . . AE911Truth operates in crisis mode – that is the standard operating procedure. Of course, it shouldn't be." (page 61)

Current practice	The organization and the CEO do not require or use written project plans.
Problem	One doesn't know what is being proposed. Volunteers and Team Leaders cannot make an informed decision whether to support or get involved with a proposed project. Inadequate planning leads to mistakes. Potential feedback of volunteers is not solicited, let alone received and evaluated.
Recommendation	Have a written project plan for every project. Those who commit to working on the project will prepare it. Have one editor with the authority to decide what suggestions to accept and what to reject.

Ed. Note: A written project plan is indispensable for whoever makes the decision to approve a project.

Mission and strategic planning

"The absence of a strategy team, the absence of objectives, and a timeline bore the presence of ineffective planning. The result was a lack of any real progress." (page 152)

Current practice	There is a mission statement but there never has been a strategic plan.
Problem	Decisions on the organization's direction are often made impulsively and are not prioritized.
Recommendation	Have a strategic plan describing what the organization wants to achieve in the next 1, 3, and 5 years and how it plans to do this.

Writing and editing in a group

Current practice	Documents are often co-written and co-edited by several people.
Problem	It is unclear who is in charge and who will make the changes or edits. Time is wasted and the editor(s) get overwhelmed.
Recommendation	Have one editor (not the CEO) edit a document, making all decisions about what suggested changes to accept and what to reject.

Decision making

Current practice	The organization does not have a systematic and organized method for making decisions. There is a misguided attempt to reach 100% consensus and a belief that without it no action can be approved.
Problem	There is no consensus. There is too much talk and not enough action. Consensus decision making gives every person in the conversation veto power. This power is frequently used to kill or delay potentially good ideas.
Recommendation	Design and implement a systematic and organized method for making decisions.

(Ed. Note): When the organization has total income of $469,000 per year (2011), gets 6,000 or more volunteer hours per year and only produces 10 or 12 newsletters a year, one speaking tour per year and one film every other year one naturally questions the organization's productivity.

Conference calls / meetings

"The calls went on and on and on, and . . . they were not productive. They were comprised of talk, no action. Every agenda was the same: discuss ideas, rehash ideas, recap the ideas, blah, blah, and blah. There are several reasons for this lack of productivity. One problem was that new volunteers were allowed to overrun agenda items with their own ideas. . . . every time a new volunteer was on a conference call, we would have to listen to the same suggestions every volunteer before had offered. What about this? What about that? Been there. Done that!'" (p. 34)

Current practice	Conference calls / meetings are scheduled but rarely planned (there is no agenda) and rarely designed to lead to decisions.
Problem	Not having a decision process that is clear leads to considerable wasted time, low morale and high volunteer turnover. Discussion and debate occur for their own sake. We go around and around in circles. These discussions and debates are often repeated the following week.
Recommendation	Have an agenda prepared in advance of every conference call and proposals (project plans) sent to the Team a couple of days in advance. Design conference calls so that they will lead to decisions.

Current practice	Decisions whether and how to do a certain project are rarely shared with all the volunteers.
Problem	Time is wasted arguing over decisions already made.
Recommendation	Make these decisions and share them with all the volunteers. Have the CEO (leading the conference calls) say, for example, "We already decided we are going to do this project" to cut off arguments against doing it. And vice versa.

Organizational structure

"Richard was not the least bit interested in relinquishing any power, and that will be the ultimate downfall of the organization as it is." (page 203)

Current practice	Too much work responsibility and authority is on the CEO.
Problem	There are only 24 hours in a day and whatever the CEO cannot get to doesn't get done. The CEO gets 4 hours of sleep per night.
Recommendation	The organization should delegate power and decision making authority to Team Leaders and other trusted volunteers.

Leadership experience and skills of the CEO

"Richard and the Board did not understand how businesses operate, profit or non-profit." (p. 203)

"Richard Gage, AIA must absolutely be removed as CEO. More accurately, Richard Gage should not have managerial control of business operations. Richard is inexperienced. He possesses no business acumen. He lacks vision; as he has admitted, on many occasions, he is incapable of seeing the big picture! That alone is a red flag for leadership. . . . . Richard belongs on the stage. He has charisma and charm which, together with his passion for the cause, makes him a great spokesman. He should be nothing more than a figurehead." (page 210)

Current practice	The CEO is a former architect, a charismatic public speaker with no business leadership experience.
Problem	The CEO is indecisive and unable to make the best use of volunteer hours and skills. Other volunteers try to fill the void of leadership, causing conflict.
Recommendation	Replace the CEO with an experienced business leader. Place the CEO in charge of public presentations.

Learning from experience

"I was greatly disappointed by the fact that Richard has seemed to devolve over the course of time rather than evolve." (page 209)

". . . when Richard is in search of water and finds only a mirage, he drinks the sand. Remember that." (page 82)

Current practice	The organization makes little or no effort to learn from experience.
Problem	Lessons are not learned. Mistakes are repeated.
Recommendation	Have project leaders or Team Leaders prepare, with input from volunteers, a recap of projects describing what went well or poorly, what to keep and what to change for next time.

There is nothing complicated about any of the above recommendations. However, adopting them will involve giving up long held habits and practices and could be emotionally challenging.

Suggested Action steps for the reader:

1) If you have contacts within the organization such as the Board of directors, volunteers, or donors share this document and discuss it with them. Share this document with your friends in the 9/11 Truth movement.

2) If you were going to donate to or volunteer with AE911Truth consider how well your money and time will be spent by AE911Truth given the circumstances described above. Be aware of these long standing patterns and habits that characterize AE911Truth. They will define your volunteer experience and may shorten it.

Consider writing to the Board to tell them you are delaying or reducing your donations (of time and money) until AE addresses these issues and implements these recommendations. You could write that you will increase them again once the Board does so. Ask for a response from the Board - at least an acknowledgement of your email.

The Board email address is Board [at] AE911Truth [.] org

Richard Gage is a Board member so by writing to the Board you will be writing to him.

Ed note: If you find this a compelling analysis please read Part III for a deeper understanding and specific details on these recommendations.

Part III

This section offers specifics in detail for the recommendations in Part II.

Proposed organizational and operational changes

Organizational structure

Have a written description of the roles, authority and responsibilities of Team Leaders, Team members, the Board members and the CEO, etc. Create accountability for these roles, authority and responsibilities. New volunteers will know who is capable of doing what in the organization. When they know what they are getting into and see the organization following some structure and delegated authority they are more likely to continue to volunteer.

Project plans

Recommendation: Have a written project plan for every project.

The components of a project plan and amount of detail for each are up to the project leader. Suggested components of a project plan are, at a minimum:

1. A statement of who the project leader is and at least the people known to be interested in working on the project.
2. The primary and secondary goals of the project.
3. A short statement of the purpose of the project right at the beginning.
4. The resources to be used such as websites and other sources of information.
5. What has already been done on this project (usually something has already been done).
6. The steps to be taken described in terms of the 5 Ws that reporters use, (who, what, where, when, why - and how for good measure).
7. The expected financial costs and benefits, if known.
8. The expected non financial costs and benefits and the likelihood of each (this section in good detail)
9. A discussion of the background including what has been done on similar projects, if known, within or outside of AE. In other words the context.
10. The commitment that the person proposing the project is making, including dates. That commitment can be conditional if necessary (on getting some help for example).
11. An estimated time line including date of completion.

How to use this: the Project Leader and the Team Leader and 1 or 2 people deeply interested in and committed to working on this project develop the project plan. The Project Leader then sends the project plan out to the other Team members for their comments and suggestions and with the understanding that NOT every suggestion is going to result in a change to the project plan. Some will and some won't. The Project Leader makes those decisions. Once this is done the Project Leader sends the project out to the CEO for his or her approval, with or without more changes, or rejection.

Decision making process

Trying to decide by consensus - at least the way practiced on AE911Truth conference calls from 2008 through 2012 and probably currently- guarantees gridlock. We want to be nice to each other and not say "no" to or disappoint our fellow volunteers. As stated earlier there is a misguided attempt to reach 100% consensus and a belief that without it no action can be approved. Unfortunately some people take advantage of this. Consensus decision making means that every person expressing an opinion on the subject has veto power over the entire proposal and any proposed changes to it.

Recommendation: Have a decision making process that is organized and systematic and known to all. Have written ground rules made available to all meeting participants, require participants to agree to these ground rules and enforce them. For example the decision making process could be the 5 steps described below.

1) Circulate a written project plan to the Team members, solicit their feedback, and have one person go through all the feedback and decide what to use and what not to use.

2) Have at least two Team members who have committed to working on the project until its completion in a time frame estimated in the project plan.

3) Circulate the revised project plan to the Team members at least one week prior to a conference call at which it will be discussed and voted on - assuming the CEO approves it.

4) (for large groups) As long as no more than 1/3 (or ¼ or 1/5) of those expressing an opinion, whether via email or on the conference call, say that the organization should NOT do the project as described, consider the plan approved. An opinion that the organization should NOT do the project is distinguished from an opinion that there is a better way to do it.

5) Once the project is complete one of the Team members who worked on the project prepares a written report to the Team describing what worked well and what did not work well, what results were achieved, and what should be kept the same or changed for next time.