

# MY VIEW



*Founder Wayne Fortin*



## REPUTATION IS EVERYTHING!

A positive reputation is an organization's greatest resource. A positive reputation is like a magnet. It attracts what the organization needs to survive and prosper. A negative reputation is like an electric fence which repels those who touch it. In TIP's case, our positive reputation has led to volunteers joining, volunteers staying, donors giving, and growth around the country.

A reputation can't be seen like an organization's buildings and staff. But we know what a reputation sounds like...

*"TIP is a great organization."*

*"TIP is the best..."*

Psych prof to student: *"You should volunteer for TIP. It will give you great experience"*

City Council Member to another City Council Member: *"TIP works great in our city. Your city should contract with TIP."*

It's important for TIP leaders to know how to build and continue to build TIP'S reputation. After all, "reputation is everything". Let me distinguish reputation building from awareness building. Awareness building is an effort to build the communities awareness of TIP by attending community fairs, speaking to civic groups, issuing press releases and posting on social media... all in an effort to have as many people in the community know about TIP as possible.

Unfortunately, a large number of people knowing about TIP does not translate into funds, growth, or partnerships and it does not build TIP'S reputation. People who simply hear about TIP do not take action on our behalf. The impact is fleeting. The saying "in one ear and out the other" is apt here. Am I against awareness building activities? No. But these activities need to be targeted (targeted marketing). We need to focus our attention and activities on those who make our organization work... volunteers, emergency responders, elected officials, board members and donors.

The fact is that TIP, like many businesses, can be very successful when there is little awareness of its existence in the general public. Let me give an example from the private sector. How many of you have heard of Ingram Tech? It's the largest worldwide wholesale tech distributor located in Orange County, Ca. They are a huge company which most people have never heard of, and they don't care. They say in their annual report: *"because we act as a middleman between manufacturer and distributor, we have no interest in being known by the public."* Likewise, TIP is a middleman between emergency responders

and survivors of tragedy. Like Ingram Tech, our success does not depend on the awareness of the general public. We should not worry (as many of us do) about being a “best kept secret.”

Of course, there are times we do need to appeal to the general public, most notably in the volunteer recruitment process. However, a successful recruitment effort does not enhance our reputation. Rather, successful recruitment depends on a positive reputation. Recruits may walk into the training academy to “check us out” but they won’t stay if they don’t hear from others (veteran volunteers/emergency responders) that we are a highly regarded organization.

If building and maintaining our positive reputation does not depend on the awareness of the general public, how is a reputation built and maintained? Here is my view...

- We need to continually remind our constituents...those who are right in front of us (volunteers, board members, chiefs, elected officials, clients...) of the importance of our mission and how important they are in fulfilling that mission. We cannot take our enthusiastic constituents for granted. In other words, we need to regularly “sing to the choir.”
- We need to do the hard detailed work of operating a top-notch organization which meets the needs of our constituents. Only then will they have a positive experience with us that they want to share with others. Only then will they be “fired up” enough to talk to family members, neighbors, friends and coworkers about this fabulous organization they belong to.

In short, when those who are involved in TIP (volunteers, clients, responders...) have first-hand positive experiences, they become our reputation bearers. They tell the many people in their lives who trust them that “TIP is a great organization.” These people in turn tell others. And our positive reputation ripples quietly through the communities we serve.