

The Exceller Fund

The Exceller Fund is a group committed the rescue of Thoroughbred horses otherwise bound for slaughter. The Exceller Fund is different from other organizations because they do not actually house the horses. They provide the funds to purchase them and pay for their upkeep while they are being rehabilitated or until they are adopted. The horses that the Exceller Fund works to save include, but are not limited to, race horses that could no longer race either due to injury or did not enjoy success at the track and are not suitable to be bred. These horses that will otherwise be sent to slaughter are purchased through the Exceller Fund and placed in loving homes. The Exceller Fund works with groups such as ReRun and the United Pegasus Foundation to attain these goals.

The Exceller Fund does this in memory of their namesake who was sent to slaughter in Europe in 1997. Exceller was the only horse in history to have beaten two Triple Crown Winners, Affirmed and Seattle Slew, as well as earning over \$1.6 million in purses. Yet all his fame did nothing to save him from being sent to slaughter. Many other races horses faced this same fate, such as Ferdinand, the 1986 winner of the Kentucky Derby. The Exceller Fund believes that no horse, no matter its pedigree or racing record, deserves to meet its end in such an undignified manner.

The organization began in 1997 originally as an offshoot of United Pegasus Foundation. Eventually the organization formally organized as its own entity with 24 members in 2001. In 2003 the organization experienced a¹ significant upheaval as the leadership of The Exceller Fund changed and formed into the current administration. With this new configuration, the Exceller Fund continued to prosper and assist horses in need. Since its conception, the Exceller Fund has raised over \$260,000 and has saved over 50 horses destined for slaughter. In the next month, the Exceller Fund will be working to save an additional 50 horses that will be sent to the kill pens from a track back East. In 2004, they approached the Race Track Industry Program (RTIP) at the University of Arizona and requested their assistance in analyzing their business structure. A group of students was selected to meet this request. This included reviewing the tax returns dating back to their formal conception in 2001, membership donations, and the amount of horses placed throughout the year. This also included a closer analysis of their expenses and revenues in the 2004 year.

The RTIP students began by analyzing The Exceller Fund's mission statement. The current mission statement posted on their website reads:

The Exceller Fund is an Internet group that raises money to rescue Thoroughbred horses that would otherwise be sent to slaughter. We do this in memory of Exceller - a racing legend on two continents - who died an untimely and undignified death in Sweden.

After the analysis of how the Exceller Fund functions, the RTIP students were able to elaborate on their mission statement to include that the Exceller Fund is a non-profit organization made up of a diverse group of people across the country, connected through the internet. They are dedicated to saving Thoroughbreds from slaughter, while increasing general awareness and the overall perception of how a horse should be treated throughout the industry by way of the mediums of the internet and fundraising. The

¹ Corrected from original report which had the year as 2002.

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Exceller Fund connects itself with various other groups committed to this same goal to make it and others more effective.

The RTIP students believe The Exceller Fund to have made significant progress to their goals but with substantial growth still needed. To analyze the Exceller Fund, the students used a SWOT analysis. This process begins by examining the strengths and weaknesses of the internal structure of the organization and the opportunities and threats towards the Exceller Fund from external sources. In the following analysis, the students will explain the various information regarding each area, as well as offering recommendations for the improvement of the Exceller Fund.

The Exceller Fund

Strengths - Analysis

Fundraising

The Exceller Fund's methods for raising money to fund their organization seem to be working well. Past fund-raisers such as the Holiday Horses have proven themselves to be a successful means of raising money. The online store offers a very good variety of merchandise with the images of many well-known racehorses such as Ferdinand, Ruffian, Personal Ensign, and more. The prices are also very reasonable which adds to the online store being an excellent source of income. Along with the online store the Exceller Fund makes use of online auctions such as Ebay to auction off things like boots and silks signed by jockeys. Exceller also offers ways for people who may not want to purchase race horse merchandise to still be able to donate while shopping, with the use of iGive.com. They also are planning to go for grants to be able to get larger sums of money contributed.

Cash Flow

The Exceller Fund has a good amount of cash going into the organization from the fund-raisers and donations. They manage their cash well and have enough to care for the horses they purchase. The money they make is actually going toward saving horses. This is a good thing as it helps build up a good reputation for the organization. It gives the organization credibility, which will make more people want to donate. People can feel confident that this organization uses their money for its intended purpose.

Volunteers

The organization seems to have a very loyal base of long term volunteers. The volunteer base is also very spread throughout the nation. This allows them access to more information throughout the country as well as offering more leverage since their group members are more dispersed. It is good that the Exceller Fund is an organization run by volunteers because this makes people more willing to donate since the volunteers are donating their time, rather than being paid money to participate.

Willingness to Improve

The organization shows an open mind by its willingness to improve and seeking outside help. They are willing to listen to others and take new recommendations into consideration. This shows that saving retired horses truly is what comes first within the organization. The change in management was a positive one as it went from one person leading to expanding to include more voices in the leadership structure. The organization is good at designating responsibility to its many members. It is also not stuck in its ways as it shows a willingness to change procedure if that is what is best.

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The Objective

Exceller Fund's mission statement to raise money to save retired race horses from slaughterhouses is a very prominent one. They also are clear that they are an internet-based group that raises the money to care for horses, but do not actually own a farm where they care for the horses themselves. Their mission is for a worthwhile cause and it appeals not only to racing fans, but also to animal lovers. Their mission is incredibly respectable as their goal is to inform people about the problem of horses being slaughtered in the racing industry. They are helping to educate people in and outside of racing about this problem which will eventually lead to the problem's resolution. Doing this in the memory of Exceller the horse is also strength because it gets his story out to the public. Exceller's fate was a very shocking one and shows people that if he could be sent to a slaughterhouse then any horse can. Exceller can also appeal to people on many continents as he was a champion in North America and Europe.

The For Sale Board

The For Sale board is a good thing because it helps reach many people. It is filled with pictures of the horses that the organization has saved. The board tells people who may be interested in adopting a horse a little about each of the horses the Exceller Fund has available. It also puts a more personal touch as people can actually see the horses that their money is being used for to help. It takes it from just hearing about the horses being saved to actually being able to see them and learn a little about each one.

Strengths - Recommendations

Fundraising

The fundraising has been successful in the past so its continuation and eventual expansion should remain a decent source of funds for the Exceller Fund. Striving to get grants from places such as Petsmart will help just to do this. Exceller Fund also could improve sales if the pictures used for the Holiday Horses focused more on well known horses such as Exceller or Rich in Dallas. Expand the Holiday Horses so they can be purchased for more occasions than just Christmas and Valentine's Day. There could also be more of an attempt to use the fundraising to try to reach a broader audience.

Volunteers

There were a few problems observed with the volunteers that could use a bit of work. The communication among volunteers does not appear to be too strong. More communication within the group could strengthen it. The Exceller Fund could utilize their volunteers more. They could form more groups within the organization to tackle more issues in getting their word out. There could also be a problem with the commitment of the volunteers because sometimes people who are not being paid for their work will feel less motivated. This problem could arise in the future. The Exceller Fund could also try to involve their volunteers and members more directly than just voting on issues on the internet. Look into the volunteers all over the country because maybe they can help more than just by giving money.

The Objective

The memory of Exceller the horse is an excellent asset for the organization to have, but it needs to push who Exceller was more. The website does not say enough about Exceller the horse on the homepage. Spreading the word about what happened to this great champion can really help draw more people into taking notice and offering assistance.

The For Sale Board

The For Sale board is an asset, but some of the photographs of the horses really do not show them in a very flattering light. People associate Thoroughbreds with very beautiful animals so displaying photographs that show the horse more favorable could help with getting them adopted. For instance, if the horse is not in the best of shape and is in the process of still receiving medical attention, then a photograph could be taken of it in its stall, so only the face and neck is visible. Another problem with the board is that it is not very clear that the Fingerlakes Link is the actual For Sale Board. It needs to be made more clear that this is the actual For Sale Board and that the Exceller Fund only posts these horses, but does not own them. Monitoring the board to be sure that horses are not being sold back into slaughter would also be an improvement. The board needs to

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be updated regularly, including removing the horses that have been bought or expired. The board should also have Exceller Fund's mission statement somewhere on it.

Weaknesses - Analysis

Adoption Process

The adoption process is a crucial factor in the ultimate mission of the Exceller Fund, to save Thoroughbreds that would otherwise go to slaughter. Though the Exceller Fund is not directly involved with the physical adoption of the horses, they do provide funds necessary to make adoptions possible as well as finding potential families to adopt the horses. However, the Exceller Fund has received numerous horses returned to them. These poor screening and placement procedures reflect negatively on their organization. In an industry where credibility is crucial to success, more emphasis needs to be put on the care of the subjects, the horses. The process of returning a horse is not only a burden on the Exceller Fund and adoption facility, but also on the horse involved. These animals have undergone massive amounts of stress as-is, thus, extensive measures must be taken to make sure that returns are made a rarity.

Publicity

Lack of publicity is a weakness that is holding the Exceller Fund back from great success and an infinitely positive influence on the racing industry. Though there are many celebrities in the industry who believe in the principles of the Exceller Fund, but none have visibly backed the organization. Many who share common animal protection morals with the Exceller Fund and would offer support, but have never heard of it. The issue is not a lack of places to publicize, for the racing industry offers multiple places of potential public coverage, for instance television, magazines, journals, and tracks. The problem is the lack of a plan of action to get the Exceller Fund publicized in the areas where these opportunities are present.

Website

In the age of the internet, websites are the first destination of many “web-savvy” individuals searching for information on any particular topic. Therefore, an impressive website is crucial to an organization’s attraction of newcomers. A website also serves as a database containing everything concerning a particular organization, which in this case includes the founding story and horses available for adoption. While the Exceller Fund’s website is full of substance, it is lacking in fluidity and organization. The substance is over-shadowed by the difficulties that are encountered when trying to find the desired information, let alone the challenge of getting back to the same information a second time. In order to be effective the website must be easy to navigate, well organized, and visually appealing.

Organization: Past and Present

Internal unification is essential in an organization of this nature, which is run on the basis of volunteers and compassion. Without internal unification, the ultimate focus

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of the organization will be misdirected and the goals will not be achieved. Another issue facing the internal organization during the period of transition is the consolidation of financial information. Fragmented sections of past financial statements do not provide substantial information to make predictions of future financial situations that may be crucial to the survival and success of the organization. Persistence is also an internal characteristic that is innumerably important in an organization that is based on the giving of others. The unification of those working inside the Exceller Fund is a key to the attention and reaction from the outside that will drive the organization to success.

Weaknesses - Recommendations

Adoption Process

A few possibilities for the improvement of the adoption process include the Exceller Fund creating a sort of “guideline” screening process that can exist as a standard for adoption centers to live up to. This could also include investigating the credibility and past placements of horses by the groups they are interested in collaborating with. Even though they are not directly involved with the placement of horses, by creating a uniform set of guidelines for a general screening of owners and placement of horses, the Exceller Fund would be able to guarantee investment in worthwhile situations and prevent stressful situations for the people and horses involved.

Publicity

In order to gain publicity and media attention, the Exceller Fund must collaborate with other branches of the racing industry. First, joint ventures, such as large fundraisers, with the involved adoption facilities, such as ReRun, would benefit both the Fund and the facility. Working together as a team, the Exceller Fund and related organizations can gain recognition and financing for the problem they are addressing. A benefit of pursuing publicity at big racing events, fundraisers, and in the media would be the education of the public about the reality of the issue of horse slaughter. Another effective way of gaining publicity would be to attract a known spokesperson to campaign the Exceller story. When members of the industry who may be hesitant about the basis of the Exceller Fund recognize a credible spokesperson backing the organization and its principles, they would be more likely to get involved. Overall, publicity is a key stepping stone on the road to the success of the Exceller Fund and its principles.

Website

A clear, concise, and well laid out website is crucial to any organization in this day and age. Though the website is difficult to navigate, the information is available. The Exceller Fund can improve its website by implementing a few simple changes. These changes include keeping information up-to-date, linking to other websites, getting published in different internet-based racing directories, and making Exceller, the horse, more visible. When a website is kept up-to-date, the viewer finds it to be more exciting, interesting, and credible, and therefore will be more likely to contribute. By linking to other websites, and linking other websites to theirs, as well as being placed in internet directories, the Exceller Fund can increase the “traffic flow” that comes across the information available on the organization. People who know exactly what they are looking for when they go to the website are only a portion of the actual “guests.” A large proportion of visitors are surfing the web and simply run across the website by chance. Another portion of the guests include people who are looking for an available adoption site, or who want to donate money or horses to a facility related to saving horses from slaughter. Therefore, the creation of an easily accessible, interesting website would be a worthwhile investment. The website lacks sufficient cohesion and organization to make it

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easily accessible to the public. It is difficult for the reader to find the information they are searching for, as well as difficult for them to navigate back to that page. The various links can be combined and reorganized for a more concise overall website.

Organization: Past and Present

Improvements involving the organization of the Exceller Fund focus mainly on the information visible to the public. It is important to provide all of the information necessary for the interested public. This would involve providing readily accessible contact information and titles of the leadership/ board of directors. Being able to personally e-mail or call the members in charge may encourage interested people to pursue their interests instead of giving up on the idea because there are no faces behind the concept.

Opportunities - Analysis

Anti-slaughter

Various states throughout the nation are banning the slaughter of horses and the sale of horse meat. A federal anti-slaughter bill has been introduced that will help the Exceller Fund. It is called the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act introduced by Nevada Senator John Ensign. This will ban the sale of horses to slaughterhouses, including ones overseas.

Support and Exposure

Exceller should be able to find support from the television and radio broadcast industry. They could also market to equine friendly communities using local radio broadcasting. Promotions through movies like Sea biscuit and Hidalgo have helped increase public awareness and interest in the equine industry. For example, using movie trailers on VHS, DVD, or in the theatres can work as a way to promote the organization.

The Blood-Horse just published an article in February discussing equine retirement farms and organizations; however there was nothing written in that article about the Exceller Fund. This would have been a perfect opportunity to increase the exposure in the racing world. Also, The Blood-Horse is not the only magazine that they could increase their exposure, as there are many different equine magazines that they could use to inform people about their organization.

Needs

The Exceller Fund is performing a good deed for ex-racehorses and is moving in the right direction, but needs to find a way to improve their system. They need to develop a better system when placing the horses with the adopting owner. They should strive to decrease the number of returns of adopted animals sent back to the organization. Besides saving the horses from the initial threat of slaughter, the Exceller Fund's next goal should be to match the right horse with the right owner.

Money

The Exceller Fund has a steady cash flow and the advantage of being an organization that uses the money where they say they will. However, the Exceller Fund can always expand its available capital. Currently the Exceller Fund has a few fundraisers throughout the year that are fairly popular. They do not work with other horse adoption and placement organizations and do little to publicize their fundraisers, other than through the members' newsletters.

Opportunities - Recommendations

Anti-slaughter

The various anti-slaughter bills at the state and national levels need additional support. The public needs information regarding these so they can write their Congressmen to ensure that these acts will be passed. Also, the Exceller Fund knows it has supporters in these areas and can work with the supporters of these bills to achieve the Fund's goals.

Support and Exposure

The Exceller Fund could make people more aware of their program during big race days or through the race replays on the ESPN show "Wire to Wire." They could use account-wagering websites such as Television Video Gaming (TVG), YouBet.com, and AmericaTab.com to expand the public's knowledge about racehorse retirement funds. If they can get information to the big bettors and increase the awareness and knowledge about the Exceller Fund, the bettors will be more likely to make a donation to the organization.

The Exceller Fund can also use famous horses as a way to promote the organization. People are familiar with equine athletes and sometimes do not realize that some of their favorite horses are being sent to slaughter. If more people knew about this, the Exceller Fund would have better chances of garnering donations.

The Exceller Fund should try to gain exposure at different equine industry events not only at the racetrack. They need to promote their cause at breed shows and gymkhana events, since it is not only the racetrack industry that gets involved with horses and their protection. They should definitely have exposure and possibly a booth at the Triple Crown and Breeders' Cup events as well.

Symposium is a huge opportunity for the Exceller Fund to get exposure. The University of Arizona's symposium is the largest pari-mutuel racing symposium in the world. Therefore, many people in the racing industry will be able to obtain information regarding the Exceller Fund and their mission. The Exceller Fund took advantage of an opportunity to have the Race Track Industry Program students evaluate their organization and to suggest different improvements so that they can compete to the best of their ability. These recommendations can also help improve the quality of the program itself.

Needs

The Exceller Fund could use other resources when finding people or organizations to adopt their horses. By working closer with other horse adoption organizations, the Exceller Fund will make itself more effective and efficient at finding good homes for the horses. The Exceller Fund should contact groups about alternative careers and placement for their horses. There are numerous groups such as prison camps that use horses as a means of rehabilitation for the convicts as well as therapeutic riding centers for mentally challenged children. Various police enforcement agencies as well as the military have uses for horses. If the Exceller Fund takes more of an initiative in

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looking for opportunities for retired race horses they will be able to find more placements. This is crucial since there will always be horses in need of adoption and places to go.

Money

The money is in the industry, the Exceller Fund just needs to find a way to obtain more of it. They can do this by informing more people about the organization. People cannot donate money or adopt a horse if they have no knowledge of the Exceller Fund. There are also many opportunities for fundraising including what that they already have been doing like the Valentine's and Holiday Horses and the Ebay.com memorabilia auctions. They can also work with other groups during their fundraisers to increase the overall exposure and cash intake.

Threats - Analysis

Ignorance

One of the greatest threats is ignorance among people in and out of the Thoroughbred industry. Those not directly involved with horses may not understand the difference between horses and other livestock, therefore not seeing a problem with horses being slaughtered and eaten as a cow or a lamb would be. Skewed values and even apathy are another form of ignorance. Some people cannot see a better life for their horses, so they assume slaughter is the best possible ending for them. Other owners are old fashioned and believe that when a horse's racing career is done and they cannot be used for breeding purposes, the most productive thing is for them is to be slaughtered. Many prominent owners in horse racing are from cultures where it is socially acceptable and even encouraged to eat horses. If a person is from a different culture, they will not be willing to give it up, even though it is general not considered correct to eat horses here.

Misconceptions

People outside of the racing industry have prior misconceptions of how Thoroughbreds off the track act. There are certain stereotypes about these horses being high strung, temperamental, and dangerous. Though this is true in some cases, it is the exception rather than the rule. Each individual horse will be act different depending on its upbringing. Even the high strung horses can be retrained to a multitude of other purposes and other careers suited to their temperament.

Constraints

The problem of horses needing places to go when their racing career is finished is not going away. There are always going to be horses in need of homes and in danger of heading to the slaughterhouse. People do not always have the time and money to retrain and care for a former racehorse, which leads to there not being enough care to go around. There is a limited availability of funds for the Exceller Fund. They also face the limitations of available boarding for the horses as well as time to find new owners.

Lack of Unification

There are horse rescue groups popping up everywhere. While the idea is great, competition within single groups and among groups may cause them to lose sight of the bigger picture – the horses. This competition can become so great that it will actually be less efficient in their goals of saving horses.

Threats - Recommendations

Ignorance

Capitalize on opportunities! The Exceller Fund should get its name out there at marquee events not only in horse racing, but in the horse industry in general. By educating the public on the problem of slaughter in this country and explaining the difference between horses and other livestock, it can get the general public aware of what they can do to help.

Misconceptions

On the website or in a brochure, the Exceller Fund should showcase former racehorses that have gone on to productive careers in many fields – from showing to therapeutic riding. This will help change the public's opinion of the stereotypes about Thoroughbreds. Once they see that race horses can be useful in other areas they will be more likely to want to help. This will lead to increased donations to the Exceller Fund and other such groups as the public takes a more active interest in protecting horses.

Constraints

The Exceller Fund needs to make it more clear to the public that in order to help the animals they do not have to purchase one. A simple donation makes a difference as well. Horse ownership is not for everyone and before these animals are placed in homes, the Exceller Fund should make sure that the person can afford the care they will require as well as it being a suitable placement for the horse.

Lack of Unification

To optimize the ability of the Exceller Fund to make a difference in the lives of the horses as well as to promote the image of the racehorse and post career race horse, they need to work with other groups throughout the horse industry. They need to join forces with groups across the country to increase their overall effectiveness. Rather than the various groups working against each other, they need to share the market since there are enough horses that need saving without everyone working against each other.