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CONSULTING

Resource: **Changing the Game**

Developing a Positive Fundraising Mindset

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“Human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.”

~Williams James

Let me begin by telling you up front that I love asking people for money. I know that sounds crazy, but I really do enjoy it. Asking people to act on their convictions, to invest in making the world better, creates powerful relationships and builds a broader base of support for the critical life-changing work being done through our organizations. That’s why I love it.

If mentoring programs are serious about sustainability, then we need to be serious about asking people for the resources we need to do our work. I know that most of you are anxious about asking people for their time, talent, and treasure. But you can get over that fear and be successful and it isn’t going to kill you!

In fact, I believe you already know most of what you need in order to achieve high-impact results. The problem is not what you know or don’t know, it is how you think. You may need to change your basic orientation to fundraising—your mindset or paradigm. This is critical. Many mentoring programs never achieve their potential because they become paralyzed afraid to act or reach out. Their doubts and fears about fundraising become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I’m going to share some concepts from workshops I conduct on individual giving as a basis for changing your fundraising mindset. But these concepts really cut across the whole spectrum of sustainability and resource development. Suspend your disbelief for a few minutes and imagine that what I am going to share with you might actually be true!

It’s Really About Passion-Raising

I believe that raising money—especially money from individuals—involves two key elements. The more important of these elements is the heart (yours and theirs), which speaks to the passion, caring, and commitment that people bring when stepping up to get involved with issues and concerns they care about. The second element, the head, requires a commitment to creating the right system for managing your resource development program.

Let’s start by talking about passion—the true heart side of this equation. Most of us get into mentoring work because it connects us directly to things we care about. In my workshops, I ask folks to include in their introductions one thing about which they are passionate—personal or professional. What gets them up in the morning and is in their thoughts as they go to sleep at night. In fact, understanding passion has become a part of the mission of my life. I am on a quest to understand why and how passion influences and moves us.

Take a moment and ask yourself, right now. What drives you to push yourself, to exceed expectations, to dream big dreams?

If you reflected on the question, I'll bet you're sitting there right now with a big, juicy smile on your face. If you were feeling tired, I'll bet you have more energy all of a sudden. You're probably feeling warm, maybe a little anxious, perhaps even restless. You want to get up and get moving! That's what passion does. It wakes us up. It demands the best from us. It changes us and it changes the world. That's why our work in the social-profit sector is about making the world a better place for the people who are hurting and suffering now, and those who will inhabit the world when we are gone. (I always use the term social-profit instead of nonprofit. This language captures the work we do and it often resonates with funders).

Passion fuels our work. It sparks our dreams. It gives us hope. It fires our imaginations. Passion gives us the courage to do, to give, and to share. Forget the language of raising funds, talk about raising passion! The money will come. The volunteers and their time and their wisdom will come. The resources you need will come when you are in the business of raising the passions of the people connected to your work.

As for the second element—the head part of the equation—you need to be able to organize and capitalize on your passion. You need a system to track and coordinate your fundraising efforts. There are plenty of resources out there to help you get organized. Just make sure that your heart and your head are working together.

Take a Cue from the Best Passion-Raisers

It is probably no surprise to you that religious institutions receive the majority of charitable contributions in the United States. Why? They ask at every opportunity and they ask with a sense of purpose, with passion, and with an expectation that congregants will find meaning in their gifts.

Faith communities engender a sense of ownership among their congregants and this is a powerful tool for mobilizing resources. It is the members of a church that build the cathedrals and turn on the lights and decorate the altar and pay the staff and feed the hungry and clothe the poor.

Our spiritual leaders understand the necessary connection between resources and making the world a better place. They have gotten over the fear of asking by trusting their faith and believing that raising money from people is not “a necessary evil,” as many of us often think. They know that raising money is part and parcel of the mission of their church. It is why they have missionaries. Giving control of one's self over to a higher power and giving of one's resources to the church has become a sacred part of the tradition and an integral component of the faith for millions around the world (regardless of the denomination).

Our work is sacred, too. And we know that people want to be a part of something wonderful that is larger than themselves. They want to direct the abundant resources they have in their life toward the things they care about most. They want their own lives to have purpose and meaning and they want to uncover and discover their own passions, hopes, and dreams. Some may already do this from within their faith tradition and that is wonderful. They probably love the way that makes them feel and they want to experience that feeling more often. They will step up when asked.

Others whose spiritual practices are more private may be longing for a public way to express their own desire to be a part of the solution, part of a community's response to the problems facing it. Your role with these folks is to take a powerful stand with your own life. Remember

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that who you are and how you live your life speaks more loudly than the words you say. Make your life an intense example. Let yourself feel the love you have in your heart for every young person whose life is changed by your program; and demand of yourself every action that you can take to help your prospective donors experience that same love.

I promise you that when you bring your authentic self into those asking moments, you will always elevate the quality of the relationship. You may still hear your prospect say no, but they will have changed. You will have brought them closer to their own passion and that is powerful. That is your mission in action. That is you building a community of committed, passionate, concerned individuals who want the world to be better. If they don't ultimately invest in your work, they will find the right and perfect place to share their abundance. Your role in this powerful result will be rewarded.

Embrace Sufficiency, Forget Scarcity and Suffering

According to the CIA World Factbook (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/xx.html>) in 2003 there was a worldwide money supply of approximately \$87 trillion.

Given these numbers, you would think that we could easily see the potential in asking our friends and family, colleagues, fellow congregants, neighbors and new acquaintances to invest in our work. Yet for some reason, we let our fear that they may say no frighten us into never asking. Instead we suffer in the misery brought on by not having enough to do our critical, life-changing, mission-driven work. And we surround ourselves with others who will commiserate with us. Enough!

One of my mentors, Lynne Twist, once said:

We don't just think things are scarce, we think from a condition of scarcity. It's not just that we believe there might not be enough; we actually have a mindset or a frame of reference that no matter what's happening there is not enough.

No matter who you talk to, you can get agreement on this, and you can get a whole conversation going about "There isn't enough of this," and "I don't have enough of that." It's a frame of reference for the way we live and think. And money is the great lightning rod for this scarcity notion.

When I'm talking to people about how to excite passion and attract new investors, I'm always met with concerns that are rooted in people's fears about not having:

- ★ enough staff or time to talk to individuals
- ★ any rich people we can ask for money
- ★ more people in the community who will help us
- ★ the ability to compete with other organizations
- ★ the money to print nice materials or go to training, or hire a consultant, or host an event, or . . .

You get the idea.

Don't get me wrong. I have been in that moment where it feels like nothing will ever change, that we just need a break, a bit of good luck, a little more money. In the end, though, I got through that moment when I focused on doing better with what we already had. Refocusing people's time. Changing priorities. Giving people room to be creative.

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One of my favorite authors, Richard Bach, writes in his book, *Illusions*, “Argue for your limitations, and sure enough, they’re yours.” Change your way of thinking. Your passion will get you started and people will notice the change. We want to be around people who are hopeful, who have faith in change, who see that the glass contains just the right amount—it’s not empty, it’s not full—it has in it just exactly what you need. You can do this.

It’s Not About Knowing Rich People

If I could choose to change just one misperception about raising money (especially from individuals) it would be the notion that not knowing people with wealth is a roadblock to being successful. Wealthy people do have money to give and you should ask them. Often. That’s easy. We agree!

What frustrates me about this conversation, however, is that most of that \$241 billion in annual charitable giving comes from middle-income, working-class, and poor people. This also happens to be most of the nation’s population! Your universe of prospective donors is huge. There are almost 296 million people living in the United States and most of them have incomes like yours and mine.

You should focus on the people you already know: the people who care about you and your organization and the things you care about. It is likely that your passions will connect. This will make your asking easier and more successful. People just like you and me want to get involved. We all want to make a difference.

I think the thought of actually asking people for the things organizations need has probably created more anxiety than any other aspect of social-profit management. Somehow we have gotten it into our heads that asking for what we need is rude or impolite or not dignified. I don’t know where this started, but it has to stop.

Your job is to ask. Their job is to decide.

I want you to accept the following:

- ★ You will not define your success by the number of people who say yes and give, but rather by the number of people who say no!
- ★ You will not be afraid to ask people for what your organization needs, and you will always ask for a little more than makes you comfortable.*
- ★ Your belief in your organization will always exceed your fear of asking.

* “How do you know how much to ask for” is the question I get most often; and there is no right answer. My best advice is to do your homework, trust your instincts, and watch for the neon sign on their forehead!

Remember the Power of Gratitude

If there is anything I have learned from raising money these many years, it is about the awesome power present in simple acts of gratitude: Taking someone’s hand and looking them in the eye while you thank them for their investment. A hand-written thank-you note. A phone call for no other reason than letting someone know how important they are to your organization.

You would be surprised at how these simple acts can transform your organization’s constituency of donors. I promise that more than anything else you can do, learning how to thank people will make the most profound difference in your efforts.

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Confucius said that “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” The same is true when it comes to building a powerful constituency of committed and passionate individual donors. If you’re still reading, my guess is that you probably have what it takes to be successful in raising money from real live people just like you and me. And, you probably have the passion to be successful no matter what funding strategies you pursue.

I want you to live outside the box, let go of old ways of thinking about money and fund raising. Shake it up and get out there and do it! Don’t wait until the system is perfect—it will never be perfect. And don’t let your fear about hearing no stop you from asking for what you need.

I’m going to leave you with a little exercise that will help you spark your passion and jump-start your fundraising efforts.

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EXERCISE: Becoming a Storyteller

One of the best ways to excite someone's passion is through the art and practice of storytelling. Stories capture the essence of your organization's powerful work. I want you to learn to tap into your own authenticity and use your passion to move prospective individual donors into powerful relationships with your program.

I want you to come up with a new story. A story from where you sit within your program. I don't mean you had to necessarily experience it firsthand, but you need to have been close to it and it needs to have touched you, personally. What have you experienced in your program that chokes you up, that makes you mad or hopeful, what is it that brings you to work every day with an unstoppable desire to do more for the young people you serve. This is the story you should tell. This is the one that will cause your prospective donors to stand in the gap with you, investing and involving themselves in the amazing, life-changing work of your organization.

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There is no real formula for the activity of developing the story—your two-minute speech. I suggest you find an hour or two where you can sit alone without interruption. Get yourself into a space where you can be reflective. Light a candle. Play some music. Think about why you do what you do. Try to remember why you got involved in the first place. Think about those moments when the work is unbearably difficult—when you might be thinking about changing jobs—what keeps you there? What motivates you to tough it out?

Is there a person that comes to mind? A young person who said “thanks” one day? A kid whose life was a mess when he first came to your program and now he is succeeding in ways unimaginable? Is it a mentor who pops into your head? Is there a volunteer whose life has been changed? Make a few notes. Draw a picture. Let yourself feel the emotion you want to cultivate in the person you'll be asking.

When the story becomes clear (and it will), write it down and practice telling it. First, practice in front of the mirror. Then in front of a colleague or two, maybe a young person, practice in front of your significant other.

Ask them for their feedback. You want this story to be powerful. It needs to be brief—two minutes at most! And you want to tell the story in a way that will move even you every time you tell it. It can't be phony. I don't want you to pretend to cry. This isn't about making people feel guilty or sorry for the kids you're working to help. This is the real deal—heartfelt emotion turned into passionate commitment. You don't need to fake it. When it's real, you'll know it, and the people listening to you will know it, too.