

10
Secrets
of
Successful
Fundraisers

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For a lot of people in the business of raising money, there's a lot at stake in these challenging economic times.

Many good organizations are in danger of going down the tubes. The important work they do is at risk. It seems everybody within these organizations has either lost their job, had a reduction in pay, or is holding on for dear life convinced that disaster is at the doorstep.

And just when things couldn't get worse, the boss comes downstairs and announces that the next job to be cut will likely be yours. You're the fundraiser and given the fact that there is no money, why should he pay you? As quickly as he appeared on the scene, he disappears down a hallway, stepping into another office with similar words to another, hoping to weather the storm of desperate need.

Glum, you sit there stunned. Even the squirrels outside the window can't offer consolation. The "acorn shortage" is taking its own toll on their population. "Buck up, Buddy," they seem to say as they look up longingly with bleary, hungry eyes, "It's everyone for himself!"

And so there you sit. Alone.

How is it in the world of want, there are some that seem impervious? Why do some flourish in times of difficulty while others seem caught in a vortex of ignominy? What do they know that you don't?

I've spent nearly 40 years trying to figure that out. And after helping thousands of organizations raise something in the neighborhood of \$2.5 billion, I've narrowed down the differences to 10 simple secrets that successful fundraisers within these organizations consistently practice. Knowing these secrets is one thing, knowing what to do with them is quite another.

This free e-book will not only tell you the 10 secrets, it will explain how you can take these time-honored principles upon which they are based and apply them right now in your work.

Don't join the desperate squirrels. Don't cower to circumstances but act in confidence that the foundational principles you'll learn here will help you accomplish what seems to be impossible.

1. Vision: Who's Leading?

My wife enjoys Ginger Rogers' movies. Watching Ginger and Fred Astaire effortlessly glide across the dance floor for her is like poetry; two artists, consummate professionals delivering complexity with a smile on their face.

And so when we first met, I'm sure Sue was hopeful I would be her Fred Astaire. Now, there are a lot of things I can do, but dancing is not one of them. It wasn't too long in our courtship that the two of us traipsed off to dancing lessons. The trouble with dance lessons is that the teachers make it look easy. The instructors glide across the floor smiling (just like Fred and Ginger) before beginning to teach some very basic moves.

Now it's our turn!

I find myself half listening to the music while concentrating on counting: 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4. It's awkward; I'm losing count constantly feeling the need to start over, and wanting to yell "stop" to the guy controlling the music all the while trying to smile just like Fred.

In her frustration Sue assumes the lead role, asking me to follow her. I'm looking at the ground, looking at her feet, barely aware of the fact that music is playing in the background. I'm stumbling over my feet, still counting, and feeling a good deal more like screaming than smiling.

The person who leads determines what will happen next on the dance floor. And the same is true in development. If you lead with urgency, people grow anxious; lead with anxiety and people grow uncomfortable; lead with need and people become defensive. How you lead sets the stage for what will follow. And as the chief fundraiser, you're the one that determines what happens next.

Successful fundraisers have discovered the secret of leading with vision.

Vision is at the heart of success. The world has changed because of the visionaries who have graced its presence. Columbus watched ships slip below the horizon and concluded that the notions of a flat earth were preposterous. He sold the King and Queen of Spain his vision and what it could mean to the fortunes of their country. The rest is history.

There are so many others that could be named who could see more than their counterparts; they were not lost to the mundane, or deterred by the impossible. They dared to dream huge dreams. Some considered these visionaries insane but others got caught up in their world. We're drawn to visionaries, captivated by the breadth of their imagination, and the immensity of their faith.

Bill Bright was no ordinary man. Bill graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, OK. In his early twenties he moved to Los Angeles and founded Bright's California Confections.

He converted to Christ while attending First Presbyterian Church in Hollywood. His vision of being a successful businessman was changed. Realizing the difference that Jesus Christ had

made in his life, he began to envision the results of what could happen in the world if college students, at the threshold of their careers, could be introduced to Christ on the college campus.

Bill's vision was first realized on the campus of the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) where Campus Crusade for Christ was founded. Today this vibrant ministry has over 26,000 full-time staff, over 225,000 trained volunteers and outreach ministries in 191 countries throughout the world.

In 1979, Bill commissioned the JESUS film, a feature-length documentary of the life of Christ. It was the first step of a multiphased plan to share the gospel with the peoples of the world.

The vision was staggering. On a planet with a population at the time of nearly 5 billion, many responded with shrugged shoulders seeing the project as being too big, too expensive, and impossible to execute.

Undeterred, Bill assembled a team and together they created a strategy that led to the successful completion of the goal. From the time Bill commissioned the film until his death in 2003, over 5.1 billion had viewed the film in 234 countries. Translated in 786 languages, the JESUS film quickly became the most widely translated film in history. Bill Bright lived in a different world. He could "see" millions watching the film in their own languages. These people lived in cities and in jungles; some were easily accessible and others required arduous journeys into some of the remotest places on earth.

Bill Bright went to be with the Lord on July 19, 2003. His vision had been realized; millions had embraced the Christ of the JESUS film.

Bill learned this incredible secret. Mediocrity isn't attractive; it's the bold vision that captures the hearts of people. And when you have a track record of tackling the impossible and succeeding, others will race to your side. Everyone wants to be a part of something that's going to make a difference.

2. Relationships: The Key to Everything

I've always kind of envied the man with the master key. While everyone else is walking around the building with tons of keys hanging from a belt loop, trying to figure out which one goes where, the guy with the master key is able to open every door in the building.

Fundraisers walk into the development office on their first day with a briefcase of ideas that just might work to generate the financial resources for their organization. Some of these ideas end up working; most don't. Scores of books promise unparalleled success if you're willing to pay the \$19.95 cover price to have something unpacked that you may already know. We read biographies; search the Chronicles of Philanthropy to see who gave what to whom; scan magazines for a new idea; and search out seminars and retreats that will unlock Pandora's box of fundraising secrets.

Our unceasing search often results in new activities, special events, or creative packaging while all the time there's a nagging sense we're only one moment away from being consumed by an economic tsunami bent on destroying everything in its path.

Successful fundraisers know that development is all about relationships.

Development has everything to do with relationships and very little to do with money. What occurs in successful development shops is an emphasis first upon engaging partners rather than donors. Fundraisers who lead with relationships, at the expense of financial gain, can be assured that money (and lots more) will follow.

Get it wrong, though, and the results will be totally different.

Organizations that choose to lead with their need (as opposed to vision), at the expense of the relationship, almost always are perceived as being manipulative. And nobody wants to feel like they've been hijacked by a shyster who pursues them simply for their money while caring little for who they are.

Understanding the steps required to building a truly meaningful, fulfilling, and reciprocal relationship is essential to successful fundraising. One of the great analogies of development is captured in the process of falling in love. As it relates to our spouses, there was a time when one didn't even know the other existed. But often, within a relatively short amount of time, these same two people who perhaps lived in distant places from one another, experienced totally different cultures, and whose backgrounds were more diverse than common stand before an officiate looking longingly into the other's eyes and say: ". . . for richer for poorer, for better and for worse, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death do us part!"

Imagine. What in the world took place in the time between total ignorance of one another to committing their lives to each other, forever? Understand this and you will understand development.

I've spent most of my career believing that everyone is looking for a place to stake a claim. We're all explorers in a vast wilderness of opportunity looking for a place where we can settle. And in the case of philanthropy, we search for an organization that is doing something we can

believe in and have confidence in their ability to do it. We have something to offer that often exceeds what we can give. And we want to settle down and get to the work of making a difference. And, just like falling in love, that point of commitment is preceded by definable steps. Understanding six important steps will bring you success like you've never known. Let's take a look.

1. The Exposure Opportunity—There was a time when two individuals who never knew each other first met. It might have been a party, a dinner meeting, a seminar, a small group; the list is endless. And when this occurred, there was something that struck a cord. It might have been a smile, a word, or something about their demeanor. Whatever it was, something stirred within them that created a level of interest or curiosity.

2. The First Date—The first date was pretty important. If they didn't have a first date, it's highly unlikely they would eventually be in a position where they would be committing their lives to one another! First dates generally occur for emotional reasons, and are exploratory in the sense that two people are seeking to find out whether or not this is an encounter that is worth pursuing.

3. The Second Date—The second date is also very important. It would have never occurred apart from the initial "date" and certainly is important if the relationship is to move forward. And while emotion may have been what caused one to respond to an initial invitation, subsequent dates tend to be more rational in that they are based on a growing knowledge and understanding of one another.

4. Taking Ownership—There comes a point, however, in an emerging relationship when everything changes. Individuals "own" a relationship when they choose to participate in its development. This becomes apparent when there is a change in pronouns, when they change from "I" and "me" to "we" and "us."

5. Vulnerability and More Significant Commitments—As relationships develop, individuals begin to let one another into their life experience. Initially they share only what they feel they can trust the other with and then gradually make more significant and potentially implicating revelations. It is a dangerous time in that it increases vulnerability and the pain of potential loss that could result if confidence is lost or trust violated. It is also essential in creating depth and significance to the relationship.

6. Big Commitment—Big commitments occur after smaller ones have proven safe. Why would someone choose to marry? Because in their mind the illusions of reality have been replaced with a depth of clarity and understanding. They feel safe and a whole lot more complete when together and are willing to risk it all for the fruit of fulfillment and intimacy.

Getting someone to the altar is not the end of the journey. If after someone says, "I do" the intensity and energy that brought you there diminishes, then the relationship is likely to be short and unfulfilling. *It takes as much work and focus to sustain a relationship as it does to establish one.*

The defining characteristic of a relationship is that it is reciprocal. Relationships that are not mutually beneficial and satisfying are not relationships at all, they're simply arrangements and they rarely survive.

3. Exposure, Involvement, Sacrifice: Wonderful Courtship

On John Smithson's first day as the chief development officer of the local college, the president was quick to summon him to his office. John was an alumnus of the school. After his graduation, he had earned the respect of the business community as a result of three successful entrepreneurial endeavors he launched sequentially over a 15-year period. Recognized as the Chamber of Commerce "Man of the Year" three different times, his stature in the community was solid.

A significant donor to the college, John was soon invited to serve on the institution's board of directors. The same entrepreneurial spirit that had led to his business success was evident in the creative approach he took to the challenges facing the growing school. He often followed the innovative ideas he introduced, checking to assure they were adopted. Success seemed to accompany him wherever he went; in the minds of almost everyone, John Smithson possessed the "Midas Touch."

When John approached the college president, expressing interest in the vacancy in the school's advancement office, it caught everyone by surprise. While the position offered an opportunity to serve as part of the administrative team, the salary was ridiculously below that to which he was accustomed. He explained to others that he had achieved what he intended to accomplish in business and it was now "payback time" to the institution that had provided him the education that made it all possible.

Two months after applying for the position, John resigned his board of director position and became Vice President of Development.

That initial meeting seemed awkward for both men. The president, rarely intimidated, seemed uneasy when John walked into his office. There was a certain confidence in John's cadence accompanied with a professional demeanor that left one feeling awkward and a little inadequate. After shaking hands and the anticipated "welcome-to-the-team" speech, the two got down to business.

"Now, John," the president began, "We believe you're just the man for this time at the college. We've seen some spectacular growth in the last ten years, much of which is attributed to ideas you introduced as a member of our board. But as we move into uncertain and uncharted economic waters, we feel we must focus on building an endowment income sufficient to offset anticipated losses in student financial aid. Our goal is to raise \$250 million in the next three years."

John seemed transfixed by the presentation, caught up in the immensity of what he was being challenged to do.

The president continued, "Now, I'm not here to tell you how to do what is being asked of you." He reached for a paper on his desk and with hardly a pause continued, "But I've compiled a list of people in this immediate area who I feel certain have the capacity to accomplish this goal. In fact, most of them could probably do the whole thing with their pocket change."

The pause that followed was intentional. John glanced through the list, recognizing many of the names. The majority of them had no relationship with the college and while they were truly wealthy, by any measure, he sensed immediately that there was little likelihood they would step

up to the levels being anticipated by the president.

Shuffling in his chair, John spoke quietly, “This is a pretty impressive list. And I believe you’re right, I would suspect that there is some unusual financial potential here. But if you are asking me to go to them now and ask them to invest, I can’t do that. What I can assure you of is that I will eventually get to each one, but it won’t be now or in the immediate future. I promise you I’ll get to each one but it will have to be on my terms.”

The response surprised the president. The comments were laced with conviction and determination, something that was difficult to counter. The president nodded and said a bit hesitantly, “Well, all right. We haven’t done anything with these people up until now. What difference will an additional period of time make?”

As quickly as the meeting began, it ended. The two politely shook hands and they left. The president walked to his desk wondering what had just happened and a determined John Smithson returned to his office.

Every successful fundraiser knows the importance of courting a donor before you ask them to marry you!

Sitting alone in his office, John thought back to the courtship of the love of his life. He remembered the day he knelt in front of her and asked her to marry him. He smiled as he thought of the diamond ring in his pocket. He had no concern that the money he had borrowed from his father to purchase it was a bad investment. He knew she would say, “Yes.”

As he sat down at his desk, he began to think through the steps he had taken to raise capital for his entrepreneurial endeavors. He remembered identifying venture capitalists and the steps he took prior to making a proposal for their support. As he walked through those steps in his mind, he recalled feeling the same sense of assurance making the appeal to a potential investor as he had when proposing to his wife. He knew they would say, “Yes.”

He jotted down things that had preceded these two memorable events. He remembered meeting his wife-to-be for the first time, he smiled as he thought of their early dates, and he could remember deep conversations they had as they strived to learn everything they could about one another. He smiled as he recalled meeting her parents and the grueling interrogation she forced him to endure with her special friends. There were talks about the possibility of a life together and all the questions that accompanied that.

But it was the absolute assurance that she would say, “Yes” to his invitation that made him wonder, “What really happened here?”

After several hours of pondering, John wrote down three words on a sheet of paper: Exposure, Involvement, and Sacrifice. Attempting to reconstruct the steps that occurred in his courtship with his wife, he narrowed it down to these three things.

1. Exposure—First, there was the initial meeting, when they saw each other for the first time. That began a series of events that would have never occurred apart from that initial meeting, when they realized perhaps there might be a possibility for a deeper relation-

ship. There were lots of other encounters over the next several months and each one provided opportunity to learn more, to understand better, and to grow closer.

2. Involvement—And then there came times when they deliberately chose to become involved at a deeper level. John remembered a time when one of them was struggling with understanding a confusing concept that had been shared in a class they both were attending, and how they had gone to the library together to find the answers to their questions. It was a shared journey with many more to follow.

3. Sacrifice—But their affection grew deep as they began to sacrifice on behalf of each other. John recalled driving 150 miles on icy roads, on a bitterly cold winter day, to a factory store to pick up a single item for his fiancée's malfunctioning furnace. And while she looked at this effort as an incredible sacrifice of time and energy, he never had conceived it as being anything more than a long ride.

Reading the list, John realized this was the answer he had been looking for. If he could replicate his courting experience with those on the president's list, he might have success in engaging them in long-term partnerships with the college.

He took the list again and began to analyze it. Some on the president's list had been exposed to things relating to the college but had never been involved or made sacrifices on its behalf. There were others who had been involved in some way but had never even been on the campus. The combinations seemed endless but the strategy became clear; before he would ask anyone for anything in terms of commitment, he would seek to accomplish and record the development of his relationship with each one on his list. Within a year the school had received over \$200 million in gifts from 21 donors. And each donor came from the president's list.

4. Failure to Bridge: The Biggest Mistake You'll Ever Make

Thousands had gathered for the week-long anniversary celebration of an internationally known nonprofit. A former President of the United States was the keynote speaker on the last evening and eager guests endured the enhanced security to guarantee their seat for the final event of a momentous week. The huge field house was filled.

Nearly \$500,000 had been spent in preparation for the week of celebration and few were disappointed. This final night was the climax. The music featured internationally known recording artists, and films were shown of the organizations global outreach over the previous 25 years, stirring the hearts of those present. The evening culminated with the President's speech. He was careful to connect the dots between personal giftedness and global need and urged everyone in the room to accept the challenge to get involved as volunteers.

Everything was carefully orchestrated to a concluding emotional crescendo. As the evening came to an end, people expectantly waited, almost longed for, the opportunity to bring some closure to the doors of opportunity had been swung so widely open. But at the end, the organizational leader simply thanked everyone for coming and bid them God's blessing.

The story I've just told you is true. I was there that evening and was one of nearly 20,000 who anxiously waited to see how the events of the evening would be tied neatly together.

I felt quite privileged to have a seat of honor on the "front porch" of one of the world's most celebrated charities. It seemed as if they had opened wide the door and allowed me the distinct honor of being able to see inside, to learn about their core values, their underlying strategies to impact culture, and to hear moving personal stories from various corners throughout the world that validated the message of the week.

By the end of the evening, I was prepared to do just about anything to help this organization. Throughout the evening my wife and I would exchange glances at one another, realizing that we may well have discovered an organization we could pour energies and resources to support. And just when we were anticipating an appeal to "dig deep" to help, we were promptly dismissed.

If the ultimate goal of the developmental process is to build relationships with others who share our passions and concerns, then "developmental strategy" must include opportunity. Imagine there is someone on your front porch, someone you would like to know better, someone you feel could be a close and trusted friend. At some point you would undoubtedly invite the person to come inside where you could sit down and learn more about one another. *That invitation to come in is called the bridge and it is strategically designed to enable you to cross the threshold into a totally new dimension of commitment.*

Successful fundraisers know the greatest mistake in development today is the failure to bridge.

Most organizations, like in my introductory story, bring tens of thousands of people to their front porch. They come to listen to a speaker, participate in a conference, enjoy a concert, whatever the event; they come because they were invited. We open the door only to quickly close it after whatever brought them there in the first place has ended.

From a developmental standpoint, this is disaster. However, it can be quickly remedied.

Think of a bridge as anything to which you have to say “yes” or “no.” It’s an invitation to come in; one that can be accepted or declined. These are rational decisions based on a body of information that, when made, indicate interest (or a lack of it).

In the development world in which I live “no” is a bad word. When someone says “no” to anything, they are closing a door. And once a door that at one time had been opened is closed, it becomes more difficult to open a second or third time. *When thinking of bridges, you must offer several opportunities, always providing one or two that are exceptionally easy for someone to say “yes.”*

Imagine if after the President spoke, the international director of this renowned organization had concluded with something like this:

“We’re so grateful you chose to spend a portion of your life with us this week. It has been such a privilege for us to share how our work is impacting the lives of individuals, communities, and countries throughout the world. You’ve seen pictures tonight and have heard with your own ears the reports of individuals who have been impacted by what we do every day.

Perhaps, after experiencing this evening, you have wondered how you might be able to plug in to what we’re doing in your community and in other places throughout the world. We’ve prepared a brochure that describes some of those opportunities and have made it available to you tonight. If you would turn to the back “tear-off” portion of that brochure, I would like to have you follow me as I explain six ways in which you could be strategically engaged in our global outreach.

First, you might want to receive our free VIP e-mail newsletter. It provides regular “alerts” to people who are concerned about the issues with which we deal and keeps you informed about things that can be done to meet these challenging needs.

We also have a regular quarterly magazine that we would love to send to you. It’s absolutely free and anecdotally provides real-life accounts of what is happening through our work.

If you would like to serve as a liaison for us within your company, neighborhood, service club, or church, you can check the appropriate block and we will happily send you a packet.

If you are interested in volunteering, there is a place on the card where you can register your willingness to be included in our regular listing of new volunteer vacancies. And if you would like to pray for us, we have a 31-day prayer guide that we would love to send to you.

Some of you may have heard our message for the first time and might want to give to support our expanding work. If that is the case, please check the box and enclose your gift in the envelope provided.

I'd like to provide a few moments now for you to register your attendance with us this evening by completing this card and should any of the six opportunities listed there appeal to you, please check one or more of the boxes. Place the card in the envelope we've provided and put it in one of the boxes at each of the doors as you leave. We would love to have you partner with us."

This is what it means to bridge. And the rules are simple:

1. Provide multiple opportunities and always several that anyone with interest can easily and confidently say "yes."
2. Bridge everything.[give a short example here? Not specific enough.]
3. Track the percentage of those present who responded to a bridge. This is called the "conversion percentage." Always strive to achieve a percentage of 30% or more.

Don't make the most common mistake in development.

5. Meaningful Giving: Never Drop \$100 in a Black Hole!

My absolute favorite website is www.hubblesite.org.

The site regularly posts images captured by the orbiting Hubble Space Telescope. I just gaze in awe at the immensity of the universe, the presence of galaxies billions of light-years away, and still no indication of a sign that says, "The End!"

And when I think of my world of fundraising, I often imagine trekking through the universe. I fantasize coming alongside the edge of a black hole. In my fertile imagination the black hole could be the fundraising campaign of the many organizations with whom I work; it could be a campaign for \$100 million or \$500,000.

The size of the campaign is somewhat irrelevant. From the perspective of the individual standing above, it's just one huge black hole. And there on the precipice of nowhere I'm holding a \$100 bill, debating whether or not I should cast it in the darkness below.

The majority of people wouldn't bother. They would just pocket the money reasoning that in the midst of such a huge need (whatever the need might be), what difference would their little \$100 make? And people with even larger amounts to contribute might come to the same conclusion.

Successful fundraisers have learned the important secret that you must give meaning to giving!

Raising money has never been particularly easy work, and in the difficult financial times in which we currently find ourselves, it is becoming even more challenging.

I have been coming alongside nonprofits for nearly 40 years. In times of economic prosperity, many of these nonprofits flourish. But it's the difficult times, the times of higher unemployment and recession that really display the character of an organization. The organization that has done the best job in building relationships with its constituents withstands the storm surge while others are washed away into oblivion.

And while the philanthropic spirit remains strong, even in difficult times, the accountability demanded by donors' increases. For the first time in my career, I am hearing donors talk about ROI (Return On Investment). Leveraged giving is the greater concern; where can I give for the greatest impact?

Successful fundraisers know this and typically respond to the new economic realities by conscientiously doing three specific things:

1. Provide Restricted Giving Opportunities. There is a general rule in development that says, "Whenever you can restrict a gift, restrict it." People like to give what they can get their arms around. It would be easier to raise \$25,000 to purchase a new van for your organization than to raise \$25,000 for the general fund. People can take a ride in the van but they don't get the same satisfaction in knowing you were able to pay your phone bill.

2. Know Your Donors. If you treat a prospective donor like any other name on your database list, they are going to treat you like just another organization. Donors need to feel special and want to be treated that way. That means a successful organization maintains data on their donors, providing specific information that helps fundraisers know who the donor is, where the donor is in his or her relationship to the organization, what the donor's interests are, and the underlying factors that drive the donor's charitable decisions.

3. Give Importance to Every Gift. If you don't treat your need as important to the fulfillment of your mission, then you can expect a donor prospect won't consider it important either. We communicate a lack of importance by not following up and bringing closure to an appeal. Fail here and you will fail in your quest for the funding required to continue.

Imagine yourself. Would you throw your \$100 in a black hole? If the black hole is presented as a meaningful place to throw down your bill, you probably will!

6. Fatal Assumptions: Two That Successful Fundraisers Never Make

The other day I was leaving the airport in my pickup truck. I had left the day before on a very early flight to Minneapolis and was returning home late the next day. Earlier in the day I had called home several times to check on things. I told my wife I would be landing a little after 10 p.m.

As I pulled out on High School Road adjacent to the terminal, I passed a gas station. I happened to glance over to check the price of gasoline and noticed my wife sitting in her car in the station's parking lot reading a book. Quickly I turned in to discover she was there waiting for my call to be picked up. I assumed since I had taken the truck, she would know I would drive it home!

I regularly make assumptions. I assume that the chef didn't add salt to my food; that the gasoline tank is always full, that every day is going to be a good day to fly, that I will never become sick, and that absolutely everyone will love my latest idea.

And when I speak, I just assume everyone grasps the significance of every word I utter. I can't even contemplate someone might not be enamored with my topic and transfixed by my delivery. I totally expect that millions will clamor to download their free copy of this e-book.

Assumptions. We all make them but there are two that are fatal to effective development!

Clarity: My audience understands my message. The first of these is the assumption that when we say something of great importance, everyone to whom we are speaking clearly understands what we just told them. If you believe that, you've never had a teenager live in your home!

I can't even remember the number of times I must have told my two teenage sons (and, believe it or not, they have successfully grown into adulthood!) that a certain behavior was totally inappropriate. It just isn't cool to belch at the table! Yet despite my appeals to act gentlemanly, there would be those occasions where they would do exactly what I had admonished them not to do.

But what was more amazing, when confronted, they would have this "deer in the headlights" look as if to say, "*You're kidding, Dad. You mean you said something about that?*"

Despite all our good intentions and all the mediums we use to communicate something in a way that's inviting and comprehensible, you must assume that the majority of people to whom you might speak simply don't get it.

Great fundraisers assume that everyone to whom they speak didn't comprehend the message they just shared!

And to some degree that's understandable. We live in a complex world that sends messages in so many different ways that we've become somewhat calloused to all of them. *It takes interest to listen and energy to digest information.*

And that brings us to the second wrong assumption.

Process and Analyze: My audience knows how to convert my message into next steps.

And this assumption is subtler than the first. It is the reason why so much of good fundraising activity is fruitless. We may have spoken with passion and shared flashy-colored brochures to support our case. *We may have done just about everything right but the one wrong thing we did was assume that those listening were going to take the energy to try to process what we just told or gave them.*

Processing and analyzing information is something most people reserve for what is of specific interest to them. For instance, medical students expend an immense amount of effort to conduct research and to learn, realizing that simply being able to reiterate accurate answers to test questions will do little to help someone on the brink of death. And what it is they garner from books is initially practiced in labs and eventually experienced in real-life situations through innumerable supervised rotations in a hospital.

That takes dedication and energy. And that's in short supply for most people with whom you will be sharing your vital message.

Great fundraisers have learned to think for people.

These fundraisers are successful because they don't assume that anyone will take the energy to try to determine the next steps being asked of them. They will often bring closure to a presentation by saying something like, "If our need is something that intrigues you, let me share with you four different things you might want to consider." They go on to precisely share specific action steps that will lead to a more involved partnership between the individual and your organization.

And great fundraisers know that you never ask someone to do something without giving them what they need to conveniently do it. Providing a pen and an envelope is simple, in fact, simply profound. It's the little things that will make all the difference in the world.

I've found it helpful to sit down before going into a meeting with a prospective donor and write down on a sheet of paper my response to this hypothetical question, "If this meeting is totally successful, what do I want to see accomplished?" When I answer that question, it helps me to determine what I will say and the steps that need to transpire to move my prospective organizational partner from where they are to where I would like them to be.

There's one assumption that is certain in this business of raising money: If you assume people understand what you just told them and will eagerly expend the energy to process and analyze it, then *you can assume that very little of significance will ever take place.*

7. Cynicism: The Fundraiser's No. 1 Enemy

There are few things that happen in life that are totally unexpected.

I remember talking one day to a group of people about this really neat idea. I was pretty passionate about the topic but have had enough public-speaking experience to be able to “read” a crowd. There was a fellow in the back row that seemed almost agitated by every word I had to say. As I continued, I found myself beginning to dread the question-and-answer forum that was scheduled next. Somehow I knew I was about to be crucified.

When the floor opened for questions and comments, he was the first to speak. He spoke loudly and with an attitude. “Now listen, Sonny,” that was the first sign of impending disaster, “you have absolutely no idea what you are talking about.” Others looked around as it became apparent he was beginning to pick up some steam, “I’ve been here for 35 years and you’re about the 15th person to stand up and tell us that this is what we need to do.”

As he spoke, everyone in the room sat in stone silence. Some sitting in front of me rolled their eyes in an effort to show me some sensitivity to the discomfort of his remarks. He went on for about 10-15 minutes telling me all the reasons why my recommendations were ludicrous and announced with a final diatribe his prediction that this, too, would end in abject failure.

There were few other questions. A few suggested my presentation was worthy of more careful study and a motion was eventually made from the floor recommending assigning the topic to a subcommittee for further study.

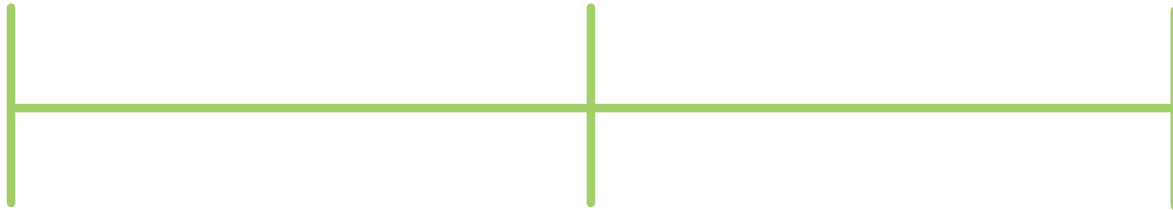
When the meeting finished, the CEO of the organization suggested that we end the evening over a cup of coffee and dessert at a local restaurant.

For the next two hours I received an explanation of what was behind the angry words spoken during the evening. He explained that the gentleman had a legitimate complaint as the organization, on four different occasions, had brought forth a series of far-reaching recommendations that came to nothing. He said the very man who was so harsh in his judgment was once a leading advocate of change but slowly had reverted to being one of changes harshest critics.

What happened that evening happens regularly in many organizations. My antagonist was horribly cynical and it became apparent to me this was a condition that had emerged over time and was clearly explainable.

Immensely successful fundraisers know the cause of cynicism and its cure.

I have used this example for many years. I draw a horizontal line on a white board. I call my line the “attitude continuum” and on either end of the line I write the two extremes: cynicism and euphoria.



I like to point out that everyone within an organization is somewhere on the attitude continuum. You can think of any relationship you have and place a dot somewhere on the line. Everyone reading this book is “on the line” as it relates to your job, your church, your service club, your marriage, favorite sports team, and scores of other relationships you experience.

Why don't you take a few minutes now to look at each of the five areas that I have identified above (job, church, service club, marriage, favorite sports team) and place a dot somewhere on the line?

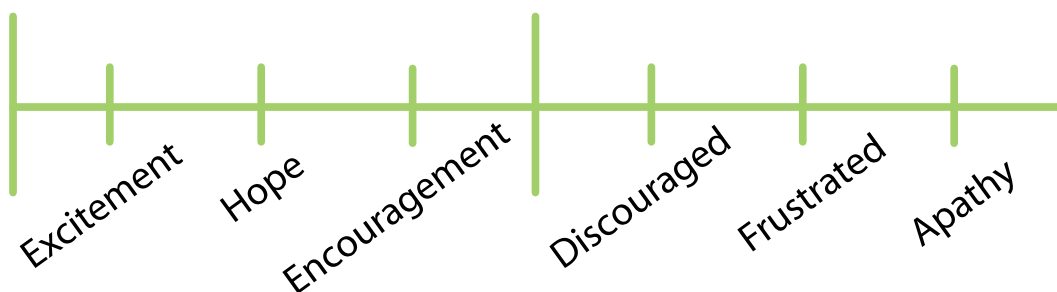
Now here's what you need to do next.

Put a vertical line right in the middle of the continuum. That's the point where someone enters into a relationship with you or the organization you represent. They are waiting to see what happens and have few opinions, just a lot of expectations.

There are also three steps that lead from the centerline to cynicism; there are three steps that lead to euphoria. The steps leading to cynicism are: discouragement, frustration, and apathy. The steps leading to euphoria are: encouragement, hope, and excitement.

Euphoria

Cynicism



Everyone enters into a relationship with expectations. No one standing at the altar before the person to whom they are ready to pledge their lives expects to eventually become cynical about their marriage, but many do. What happened?

When expectations aren't realized, we initially become discouraged. And when discouraged is not dealt with, frustration is quick to settle in. Frustration is reflected in intense anxiety because typically the frustrated person knows exactly what caused him or her to be discouraged and is anxious because no one seems to care to deal with the problem (to which they have the solution, of course). Eventually frustration will yield to apathy as it is concluded that "if they don't care, why should I?" The end result is cynicism, a critical spirit that has its roots tangled in unresolved circumstances.

On the other hand, when expectations are realized, people become encouraged. Continued encouragement is reflected in hope, a sense of anticipation that perhaps you've found what you're looking for. Hope nurtured leads to enthusiasm. When things happen as we anticipated, time and time again, then the result is euphoria.

My guess is that as you look at the different stages I have mentioned, you probably can identify the circumstances that led to where you are on the attitude continuum. And for organizations with constituents in various places on the continuum, it is essential that you understand two important things:

1. Where anyone is on the attitude continuum is reflective of their perspective of you being able to do what you say (or imply) you are going to do, and
2. Where anyone is on the attitude continuum, you've placed them there!

The attitude continuum is the organizational pulse. Where people are will tell you volumes and will dictate what you need to do.

One of our biggest mistakes in fundraising is the failure to create expectations. And when you don't create them, then others will do it for you and you become the big loser. Great fundraisers know this and are quick to define not only what they want to do but are careful to announce each of the steps that will lead to its successful conclusion. Make your expectations very clear; getting everyone on the same page. The extra few minutes of "creating expectations" now can eliminate a world of hurt later.

The cure for cynicism is success. The key to maintaining enthusiastic and euphoric supporters is by regularly celebrating successes that lead to the fulfillment of your vision.

8. Create Cubbyhole Donors: Junk Drawers and Development

We have a drawer in our kitchen. Whether you're looking for a screwdriver, a nail clipper, an extra set of glasses, a 3x5 card, a pen, a paper clip, a pair of scissors, or some hand cream, you'll find them in the junk drawer. It's a catchall for all those things we don't know what to do with.

I've discovered that everyone has a junk drawer.

For years I had a junk desk. It's called a roll-top and I loved mine. It had tiny little cubbyholes and had a purpose for each one. There was one in which I put the boarding passes of flights I had taken that year, another where I kept a supply of thank-you cards, a drawer in which I stored receipts, and a slot where I could keep a few files. I loved my roll-top desk because I just happen to like cubbyholes.

Successful fundraisers have learned the secret of the cubbyhole.

You see, it's one thing to ask for money. We all do that because we realize we need money in order to accomplish some of our organizational objectives. And in many instances we are successful and people give us money, but often what they give is far less than what we might have anticipated. We might have expected \$1,000 and we get \$100. The problem is we asked for a gift and that's exactly what we received.

But imagine framing the appeal another way. Let's say that you decide to create a donor group of 300 people in your community. You see these 300 as pillars upon which you can build much of what you have a vision to accomplish. You decide to call this group The Cornerstone 300 and you intend to ask 300 qualified prospects for annual gifts of \$1,000.

Now if you were to ask 300 people for a gift, there's no telling what you might receive. But if you were to ask the same 300 to become part of an exclusive group of supporters called The Cornerstone 300, you might receive \$300,000.

The Cornerstone 300 is an example of a cubbyhole. Here's a place where people, who have the capacity to consider a gift of this size, can "plug in" to your organization. And maybe throughout the year you plan special ways of recognizing this elite group. You might have special programs designed for them, a newsletter that is exclusive to this "inside group" of special friends, a published list of their names in an organizational newsletter, an annual report that focuses upon achievements made possible because of their generous donation, a special Christmas remembrance, and personal letters and phone calls from the president at scheduled times each year.

There are other donor cubbyholes. They might be designed to appeal to individuals who could give gifts from \$1 to \$1,000. Many organizations refer to these as "core" donors and have core donor programs to accommodate the various size gifts which they might choose to give. Someone might be able to commit to \$52/year, another to \$104, another to \$260, another to \$520, and still another to \$780. (By the way, that's \$1/week, \$2/week, \$5/week, \$10/week, and \$15/week.) What most organizations discover is that when programs like this are launched, donor reports begin to reveal plateaus of giving around the amounts of money suggested by the various cubbyholes of opportunity.

A non-funding program doesn't necessarily generate income but it is structured in the same way and brings people into relationship with an organization. A Prayer Partner's Network, for example, would be a non-funding program. It brings people together, not for the purpose of giving, but for the purpose to pray. A Senior's Auxiliary brings seniors together, not for the purpose of giving, but for the purpose of serving.

And just as there are *funding programs* like those mentioned above, there are *nonfunding programs* that hold the same appeal to prospective constituents. These programs don't necessarily generate income but are structured in the same way and bring people into relationship with an organization. Programs like Senior Auxiliaries, which brings seniors together, not for the purpose of giving, but for the purpose of serving; Sponsorship Programs; and even Prayer Partner Fellowships are excellent examples of cubbyholes where people can become a partner with you in furthering your mission initiatives.

Providing cubbyholes are excellent examples of helping others think through practical ways they can be a partner with you. The successful fundraiser realizes this and sees individuals beyond just their capacity to give money; *everyone has something to offer* and there just may be a perfect cubbyhole available that will creatively appeal to their giftedness and their need for structure.

9. Ask Questions: The Greatest Compliment

Pretty much every one in the field of development has launched something that didn't work out the way it was intended to. And usually there is someone around who isn't opposed to reminding you about it!

I can't count the number of times someone has looked at me and said something to the effect, "You know, if you had asked me, I could have told you this would have happened!" And it's times like these that I find myself biting hard on my tongue and asking forgiveness for all the things I would like to say before politely acknowledging that it might have been a good idea to have sought their counsel.

And just in case you're feeling a little nostalgic pain right now, there's an important point in my illustration that should be taken seriously. Ask questions before you launch new initiatives and seek input from those individuals who have the potential of derailing anything you might do.

The great fundraisers know that the greatest compliment you can extend to another is to ask them a question!

These same successful fundraising professionals have learned that you recruit partners before you secure donors.

Reflecting on my career of development work, it was this discovery that contributed most to my professional development; the discovery occurred as a result of a practice I began early on and continue to use to this day.

As I approach a major project, I ask myself one question, "If this project is going to fly, what groups of people would I consider critical to its success?" I begin by making a list of what I have come to call "critical groups" and begin to identify individuals within each group that I believe are influencers, the "movers and shakers." It's these people I need to hear from.

I go to great efforts to get to these key leaders. Often I'm required to seek the help of someone who knows them well in setting up a meeting. I remind them that this isn't a solicitation visit; I want them to understand I am seeking help and counsel on an important project and I believe they could provide valuable input.

When I sit down with my guest (and I almost always am successful in scheduling a meeting), I walk through the process that resulted in my invitation to them. I point out that I believe they are a leader and as a leader of a group I would perceive as critical to the success of some of the things I am involved, their insights and counsel are extremely valuable to me.

I go on to explain the project and may even provide some written information that explains it in greater detail. I just pass it on to them without too much explanation, telling them it's just something they might want to take a look at later. I'm more focused on getting to a question so I can stop talking and start listening.

The question I ask goes something like this: *“You know, I’ve been thinking of creative ways to engage people that are a part of the group you represent. I’ve got lots of ideas but there’s so much I don’t understand. If you were in my shoes, what kind of things would you do that would capture the imaginations of people in your group?”*

When I know they understand the question, I sit back and listen. Things may start out slow but as time goes on they begin to help me understand the dynamics of the group, things that haven’t worked in the past, and ways that the group (and individuals in it) functions. Usually I’m asking a lot of clarifying questions, trying to really delve into a culture I clearly don’t understand. And the more questions I ask, the more animated they become.

At the end of the meeting, I walk out with an incredible amount of information that I could have spent a lifetime trying to figure out on my own. But sitting down and simply asking a question, communicated to my new friend that he had information I didn’t have. It was very valuable information that was essential for me to know before I launched something that otherwise would have fallen on deaf ears.

The value of this approach goes far deeper than simply getting important information. Many people who I have asked these questions have ended up becoming organizational partners and some of my best friends. They regularly check in with me, they have tracked my career, and most of them have adopted a similar practice of asking before telling.

10. Linkage: The Most Important Rule

I'm mostly an observer.

I enjoy sitting on a park bench and watching people. I also find it interesting to look at successful development officers and attempt to dissect what makes them so effective. I find it intriguing to watch people argue; I try to uncover the points they are trying so ineffectively to communicate. There's a lot that can be learned by watching and listening.

I *think* “*postmortems*”— taking time at the end of an activity or event to analyze what was good, what worked, and what didn't— are important to development. It's good to sift through data and look for common denominators; those things that when present always seem to work but when they're absent take on a totally different look.

There has been some fruit from this intriguing work of observing. My search for “common denominators” has resulted in a series of rules that I've discovered seem to be behind development success. They're almost like the rules of physics; there is a corresponding reaction to every action. And while there are all kinds of rules that drive the development process . . .

. . . **successful fundraisers realize that the most important rule of all is the rule of linkage.**

The rule of linkage is stated something like this, “The closer someone is linked to you the greater the likelihood they will support you.”

Not everyone on your organizational database is closely linked to you. You have individuals on your database who benefit directly from the services you provide. They love what you do and when given the opportunity are anxious to come alongside and help you to continue your good work. But there are others who aren't as close and experience has shown us that individuals that don't benefit directly tend to be less likely to get involved.

I'm the youngest in my family; I have two “perfect” older sisters. Most of my life my two sisters were trying to figure out where I really came from. My birthday is on Christmas Day so I believe the two of them concluded that I must have come from the North Pole and on Christmas morning in 1944 Jerry just showed up on the fireplace hearth.

But like my sisters, I could point to my mother and father and remind them that we, all three, share the same birth parents. *We are “naturally” linked.* If my parents had chosen to adopt a child, however, that child would have become a part of our family as well. Through the adoptive process linkage was “created.”

Successful fundraisers have learned wherever you don't have natural linkage, it is essential to create it.

Corporations and businesses in a community don't tend to have a lot of close linkage to non-profits. When appeals come their way, it is easy to cast them aside and move on to something more important. The successful fundraiser knows how important it is to create linkage to increase the likelihood of a positive response.

Many of our nonprofit clients launch Corporate Partnership Programs; a means wherein corporations and businesses can become a meaningful part of the organizations outreach into the community. Others have Corporate Advisory Boards that are made up of CEOs who provide counsel to pressing issues. In either case what was done was effective in creating linkage.

Imagine a fundraising appeal going to all the corporations and businesses in a community at year-end. Half of them were involved in either a Corporate Partnership Program or their CEO served on the Corporate Advisory Board, the other half were just names gathered from the Chamber of Commerce directory and added to the organizational database.

Which group would most likely respond to the appeal? It's obvious the group that had chosen to become a part of the programs offered by the nonprofit. Why? Because the organization made an effort to create linkage!

The rule expanded is, "*wherever you don't have natural linkage, seek a means to create it!*"

The further you step back and analyze success, the more clearly you see the vital role that linkage plays. A peer going to peers generates better results. Where linkage exists there is vitality. And where there is life, there is the realistic hope of wonderful success. *Linkage is the development trump card!*

Conclusion

Behind the curtain of success, there's a supporting cast.

It's not the stagehands that receive the glory as the audience expresses appreciation for a job well done. As performers are acknowledged for their work, the attention to detail given by a host of others passes without notice and with little, if any, recognition.

But it's behind the scenes where so much of the foundation is laid to assure success on the stage. That certainly is the case in the matter of raising money.

It's work to build relationships, to track and monitor progress, to think through issues like linkage and bridging, and to invite others to share in the process. It's this and probably a thousand other things that contribute to the enduring success of organizations that thrive.

At the end of one of the most notable sermons ever delivered, Jesus Christ shared a memorable parable (Matthew 7:24-27). He spoke of two men who each build a house; one was constructed on a rock and the other on shifting sand.

Both of these houses look the same when the sun is shining. It's not until the winds begin to blow, the rains begin to pour down, and the flood waters rise that the differences between the two become apparent. The house on the rock withstands all that nature can deliver, the house built on sand crashes to the ground.

Economic crisis and scores of other factors can deliver devastating blows to the organizations we represent. And in the midst of the storm, there may be things we can do to manage damage, but it's also an opportune time to take inventory and begin the work that may have been too long neglected. This will not be the last storm.

The Ten Things Successful Fundraisers Know

1. Lead with Your Vision, Not with Your Need
2. Development is all about Relationships
3. Court Before You Ask Someone to Marry You
4. Bridge Everything!
5. Give Meaning to Giving
6. Never Assume Anything
7. Defeat Cynicism with Success
8. The Importance of Packaging
9. Create Ownership through Asking Questions
10. The Linkage Trump Card

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Known throughout the world as “the architect of relational development,” Jerry Twombly speaks annually to thousands on core relational principles that drive success in both the world of philanthropy and in the world of business.

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