

Everyone Knows “Someone”

By Ken Bartels, Principal, Ken Bartels Consulting

On every Board of Directors there will be a few individuals, hopefully just a few, who are reluctant to participate in the organization’s fundraising efforts. Beyond their own gifts, these folks just find it difficult to see themselves as ‘fundraisers’. While presidents and staff might wish it to be different, this reality is present at many institutions. These reluctant board members may even be some of your best volunteers and friend raisers, maybe they are even among your board leadership. This circumstance can lead to challenging discussions and perhaps to considerations of leaving the board from both sides.

No one can afford to lose good board members. At the same time, no one can ignore a lack of involvement by board members in the fundraising process. So, what can be done?

Fortunately, there are ways to assist these fundraising-averse board members in overcoming their concerns and fears by both direct and indirect routes. They may not resolve the issues in all cases but they can be effective for many.

Direct Routes:

- Adopt a strong mentoring plan, pairing strong board fundraisers with weaker ones. Let them work together, work with staff and let them become more comfortable by allowing them to visit with already good donors with good track records.
- Take advantage of their strengths, let them ‘get their feet wet’ perhaps with an event-oriented committee role or an institutional representative role.
- Be sure that they spend some time with the Vice President for Development/Advancement discussing the principles of fundraising, how it is not ‘just selling philanthropy’ or cold-calling but has its roots in cultivation strategy and the pairing of interests between the donor and the organization.
- Permit them to understand that the best fundraising is ‘donor-driven’.
- Stress to the board member that over time their skill set should include fundraising and that they will feel much better about their overall service once they capture the essence of this vital effort.

Indirect Routes:

- 'Everyone' knows 'someone'. It's true. Every board member from the most social to the most reclusive has a sphere of influence. Everyone has friends, contacts, business associates, memberships and all the rest. Because all board members possess these assets, they can be used to the organization's benefit. Ask all your board members to answer this question: 'who do I know that isn't helping this institution who ought to be'? Have them make their lists and in so doing see all the potential that exists in their own personal network.
- Sometimes even making this noted list of their friends and associates will be a cause for alarm for these fundraising-shy board members. This can be overcome, however, by taking them off the hook somewhat. Indicate to them that just by placing a name on their list they are not necessarily signing up to be the one calling them, and perhaps, they will not be contacted by anyone depending on the situation. This, hopefully, will allow them to think without limitations or concerns over their needing to be directly involved in the solicitation.
- They do have a duty to fulfill, however, with their list. If they place a name on their list, they must be willing to share how they know this individual or organization, why they think they might have an interest and provide basic contact information. So, it's not a pure 'kiss and tell' situation. They must have some involvement in determining if there is rationale for approaching their listed names for assistance.
- All board members must understand that part of their board obligation is to be ever alert to fundraising potentials within their own, personal worlds. They need to be alert to these potentials throughout their overall connections. Who do they sit with in church? What are the parent names of their children's friends? How successful have their college fraternity brothers become? Where does their spouse work? Who comes from wealth in their neighborhood? All of these and many more are questions to be posed and answered by board members.

Okay, this may already seem like overkill for board members who 'do not like to fundraise'. But it is an essential, necessary, effort in order to maximize board and institutional fundraising potential. If you can convince all your board members now

and into the future that raising dollars and donors for your organizations is a doable and an enjoyable experience, just imagine what wonders can be achieved. Fundraising remains an acquired skill for almost everyone. It also is a creative blend of art and science when it is implemented well. If all board members can embrace it, institutional success will be enhanced.

After all, 'everyone' knows 'someone'!