

Telling the Story: The Board Member as Ambassador**By Brydon M. DeWitt, President**

It is far too typical for Board members to voice concern about their roles in raising money for the nonprofit they collectively own. Most profess that they do not feel comfortable asking someone for money – *yea and verily*, they “hate” doing it. That “fundraising thing” has to be somebody else’s job.

Whatever the typical Board member may think, he/she must accept responsibility, along with the CEO and development staff members, for the development of the nonprofit. The budget that the Board considers and passes does not automatically get funded. And, as an owner of the organization, each Board member shares an obligation to make certain the nonprofit has the money it needs to serve its clients.

It must also be stipulated that not every member of the Board has the ability to be successful in making the ask for major dollars. Even with training and raising the Trustee’s comfort level, there are a number of Board members who will not be successful in asking for money. However, every Board member can be an Ambassador for the nonprofit and actively participate in building the foundation on which both friends and funds can be raised.

As an Ambassador, each and every Trustee should be an enthusiastic advocate for their nonprofit. It is a basic responsibility of Board members to positively and productively represent their nonprofit businesses to their friends, business associates, and the community at large. In truth, talking about their nonprofit should be a joy. Through interactions with others, Trustees can convey, on a personal level, how the nonprofit’s mission is providing services to their clients, why the organization should be important to their audiences, and share their own enthusiasm for the organization and its mission.

To be a confident and an effective Ambassador of their nonprofit requires that Board members be prepared for these conversations. The CEO and Board chair should insure that the members are kept informed and up-to-date so that they are comfortable in interpreting the programs, policies, and objectives of the organization. Properly prepared, Board members should:

- Tell the story of their nonprofit at every opportunity;
- Look for opportunities to speak or invite others to speak about the organization in their churches and clubs;
- Be aware and advise the CEO about rumors that may be detrimental to the nonprofit and help correct misperceptions;

- Bring individuals who share missional interests together with the CEO and other leadership to get to know their nonprofit and its work.

There are a number of ways that the CEO and Board chair can help Trustees be prepared to be effective Ambassadors.

- Use the Board meeting to update, provide information, and build enthusiasm for the nonprofit.
 - Include progress on strategic planning goals and objectives on the agenda for each meeting;
 - Provide a time for a presentation on one aspect of the nonprofit's program;
 - Plan and conduct an in-service training opportunity during at least one Board meeting per year;
 - Keep the mission of the organization before the Board at every meeting;
 - Remind Board members of the answers to the question: "If our organization did not exist, would somebody invent it?"
- Create a Board member business card with bullet points about the work of the nonprofit that Trustees can hand out to business colleagues and others.
- Conduct an annual half-day special Board meeting to enable:
 - Self-analysis of the Board and each member;
 - Review of the Board job description;
 - Size of the Board;
 - Structure of Board committees;
 - Setting of objectives to strengthen the Board during the next 12 months.

When Board members feel enthusiasm about the nonprofit and have the tools to spread the word, they will feel empowered and proud to tell the story of their organization. Board members can:

- Assist individuals in their community who share concerns with which the nonprofit deals to get to know the mission and work of the organization

- Make a list of the persons you know who should know more about the organization;
- Provide the list and what you know about these persons to the Board and staff leadership;
- Determine the most appropriate and comfortable ways for these individuals to become more knowledgeable of and potentially involved with the organization;
- Assist in the follow through with these persons:
 - Make certain they are on the mailing list for newsletters and other informational pieces;
 - Invite them to attend organization sponsored/hosted events;
 - Host a focus group meeting where the organization's mission, plans, and needs are presented and discussed.

These are only a few suggestions on the ways that Board members can be comfortably involved and successful in helping others understand, accept, and appreciate the nonprofits they serve. Whatever ways you choose, remember that Board members need to feel prepared, be trained, and have specific suggestions on how to represent the nonprofit to others. And, when successes occur, the praise should be given within the Board meeting to encourage the behavior of other Trustees. Remember, building and keeping a productive Board is an active, not passive, process.