

The CEO and the Development Chief

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Qualities of a Successful Chief Development Officer

How can a CEO be certain that she/he is hiring a chief development officer who will provide the marketing and fundraising leadership the nonprofit needs?

There are many theories about who will be successful in guiding an organization's program to raise friends and funds. Experience shows us that the best individuals for this calling are those who are more interested in others than in themselves. An author whose name is not known to the writer succinctly describes this fundamental quality of an effective development officer:

"No psychology of dealing with people really works unless we are genuinely and truly interested in other people. All else is trickery and sooner or later will fail."

Successful development professionals honestly like people. Even when tested by those volunteers, prospects, and donors who display unlikeable tendencies, they still look for positive ways to interact with them and help them have good experiences with the nonprofit they represent.

Development professionals must, in fact, have an optimistic outlook that is deep-seated and real. We are not suggesting that they should be Pollyannaish, but often they are the ones who must believe that fundraising goals will be achieved and infect and sustain others with that belief.

Those who will be happy and fulfilled in nonprofit marketing and fundraising must be more interested in the organization's success than their own. Self-promotion is a sure sign that an individual will not last long in development. If you find yourself wishing you were in the photo with the CEO and volunteers and harbor feelings of resentment because someone else reads and gets credit for copy you have written, you will not likely continue in the profession for very long. By the very nature of the job, the development officer -- at every level -- works best through the preparation and management of others. Satisfaction is derived from the volunteer and organization's successful accomplishments, not whether or not the development staff member gets credit.

Finally, a CEO must hire a chief development officer with whom she/he can establish a close working relationship. Fundraising success will depend upon having a partner whom you like and respect.

Teamwork

The nonprofit will benefit, as well, if the CEO is wise enough to recognize her/his strengths and weaknesses in development, honest enough to share this information with the chief development officer, and open enough to learn and adapt to new skills. It is, unfortunately, not unusual for CEO's to profess they do not enjoy asking for money.

The attitude of fundraising-reluctance on the part of CEO's was in full display in an article published in The Chronicle of Philanthropy about a decade ago. The author reported that nonprofit chief executives were desperately seeking a "professional fundraiser" to head their development programs. If only they could find that super salesperson to solicit major gifts, then they would solve their organizational funding problems. Also, the CEO's reasoned, they could get on with running their organizations without having to be much involved in raising money. We have tried to deal with this in the previous chapter -- that chief executives must give leadership to raising major dollars and abrogate this responsibility at the peril of their nonprofits. However, a good working relationship between the CEO and chief development officer is essential to securing significant financial support.

A number of years ago, a university president and his vice president for development were faced with a challenge that most nonprofits would welcome. A donor had pledged several million dollars to the university if a like amount could be raised in matching funds. The sum was so significant that success would be transformative moving the institution from a regional to national presence. The challenge was met, but the methods are most instructive than the amount. This university president and the vice president respected and liked each other. They agreed upon the roles each would play. The president opened his calendar to the vice president so that appointments could be made for him. They met regularly to discuss prospect and strategies and, in the vernacular, "had each other's back."

This is a true story, though it may seem like fantasy to a majority of development professionals. Yet, when the CEO and the chief development officer establish the proper working relationship, the organizations they serve have the best chance of moving toward fulfilling their missions. Here are a few tips that may help in building the team effort.

First, the CEO:

- Should first hire a chief development officer that he or she can respect, trust, and enjoy working with;
- While not anxious to ask for money, should be open to learning and growing in this critical role;
- Should be affirmative about making the development program a high priority in the organization and in the budget;
- Should insist on a written annual marketing and fundraising action plan and participate as appropriate in creating strategies;
- Should intentionally make time available to the chief development officer for regular planning meetings and for the cultivation and solicitation of major prospects;

- Should understand the need to help the chief development officer keep the development team motivated.

Next, the chief development officer:

- Should accept the responsibility for creating, with the CEO, the game plan for marketing and fundraising and the responsibility for carrying it out;
- Should perform all background work to prepare the CEO for interaction with board members and major prospects and donors;
- Should understand the strengths and weaknesses of the CEO and design initiatives that take advantage of his or her talents;
- Should always do more than what is expected;
- Should understand and accept the role of helping the CEO carry the weight of responsibility for the organization.

Productive relationships are cultivated, and the professional and personal relationship between the CEO and development chief can propel the nonprofit to success or be an impediment to it.