
They Said They Would Raise Money... Now What?

Twelve Tips to Help Board Members Hold Each Other Accountable

BY ANDY ROBINSON

If, as the saying goes, the road to oblivion is paved with good intentions, then I've met a lot of board members walking down that road. Off they go, carting their families, pets, friends, jobs, bills, chores, and health concerns along with them. Somewhere in that cart is a list of board tasks, including fundraising. Guess which tasks fall to the bottom of the list, buried at the bottom of that cart?

Although it's important to honor the best intentions of our volunteer leaders, it's even more important to support them and help them to follow through on those intentions. Here are a dozen ideas that can assist you in creating a culture of fundraising on your board and — even better — a culture of accountability. Not every idea is relevant to every organization, so treat this list as a menu and choose the items that best fit your needs and circumstances.

1. Identify a Sparkplug or a Team of Sparkplugs — Then Empower Them to Lead. If you're striving to build a culture of fundraising on your board, somebody needs to say to the other board members, peer to peer, "Yes, this is our job. Let's figure out how we can support each other to follow through better on commitments."

If the word *sparkplug* doesn't work for you, how about coach? Or cheerleader? Or enforcer? Without assertive board leadership, the ideas that follow will be much less effective.

2. Develop a Board Agreement or Job Description That Includes Fundraising. Be explicit and detailed. The best of these documents are reciprocal: they itemize both what you expect of the board members and what they can expect in return. For example, if you want them to raise money, it's only fair for board members to receive relevant training, materials, and list of fundraising activities from which to choose.

3. At Each Board Meeting, Everyone Self-Reports. Take ten minutes for a go-around so every board member can say,

"This is what I've done since the last meeting to support fundraising." There's no shaming or blaming, just self-reporting. However, the expectation of having to speak might provide enough incentive to get those wavering souls to follow through in advance of the meeting.

4. Create a Line Item in the Budget for Board Giving. When the annual budget is prepared, trustees must ask themselves, "How much can we collectively give? Are we a \$2,000

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board? A \$5,000 board? Is \$10,000 a good goal?" Debate the number, set a target, then hand out pledge cards. At board meetings, each budget review serves as an indirect reminder to those who have not yet fulfilled their pledges.

5. Create a Line Item for Board Fundraising. This is money that board members raise above and beyond their own personal giving. Once again, the board debates a goal, sets a dollar target, and reviews progress at each meeting.

If board and staff do something together — for example, they team up to meet with a major donor — then credit the gift to the board member. Since our overall goal is to promote follow-through, it helps to reinforce positive behavior.

6. Solicit Challenge Gifts Based on Board Behavior — Not Necessarily Tied to Dollars Raised. For example, approach a major donor or foundation with the following request: "To inspire our board, we'd like a challenge gift of \$_____ contingent on board involvement in major donor outreach. We suggest a benchmark of 20 asks — if board members participate in 20 donor meetings, we collect your gift." The beauty of this approach is that it's tied to behavior, not results; you can approach 20 prospects, get turned down 20 times, and still receive the challenge grant.

7. Provide Regular Fundraising Training to Your Board. This could be a full-day workshop at an annual retreat or twenty minutes at every other board meeting for a quick practice session.

8. Invite a Group of Your Donors to Talk About Why They Give. Once each year, dedicate time to hear from your support-

As appropriate, reward prizes to those who meet their individual goals, show courage, and inspire others.

ers: why they care about your work, how they like to be approached, and so on. Include Q&A. Demystify fundraising by having a conversation with actual donors.

9. Offer Rewards to Board Members Who Make an Effort. Approach local restaurants for free meals. Ask local shops for gift certificates. Encourage a bed-and-breakfast or local hotel to provide a free night during their slow season. (If giving freebies to the board feels like a conflict of interest, it might be worth investing a little money to buy these meals or gifts.) As appropriate, reward prizes to those who meet their individual goals, show courage, and inspire others.

10. Make It Competitive. This won't work with every organization, but I've seen boards that respond well to competition. Divide the board into two teams — Greens vs. Blues, Hummingbirds vs. Woodpeckers, whatever — and see which team can meet with the greatest number of donors, generate the largest turnout for the annual event, raise the most money. Once again, prizes can be used as incentives or acknowledgment.

11. Define Real Consequences for Not Meeting Commitments — Then Apply Them. What happens when board members don't meet their goals? More pointedly, what do you do if they

flat-out refuse to participate? Are they asked to take on other responsibilities to free up the willing fundraisers? Are they encouraged to leave the board or take a different role within the organization?

These consequences can't be mandated from above, but they need to be discussed openly: "With the knowledge that we're all volunteers, how do we set expectations for each other? How do we hold each other accountable? If people can't meet our shared expectations, is it appropriate to transition them off the board? If so, how can we do this in a transparent and humane way?"

12. Bring in New Blood. New people often bring a fresh perspective. If they're recruited with the understanding that fundraising is a shared responsibility, they are much less likely to say, "That's not my job," or "I didn't join this board to raise money." When recruiting, remember to let prospective board members know that board fundraisers receive training, support, appreciation... and maybe even prizes!

Finally, remember that culture change is long-term process. Your investment in creating a culture of fundraising will pay off slowly at first, but with persistence and patience it can transform your board and, by extension, your entire organization. The sooner you begin, the sooner you win... so get started now. **GF**

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