



# Take Ten Minutes

## Principles to Consider before Engaging in Fundraising

By Barry Silverberg

**A**fter taking a speed reading class and reading Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Woody Allen was asked what the book was about. He responded, "Russia."

Most people would respond à la Woody Allen, that fundraising is about "money." BUT they would be only minimally right.

Fundraising is about far more than asking for money. It is about engaging someone in your cause and giving him or her the opportunity to do good. It is also about organizational credibility.

Since so many volunteers and agency professionals set out with high hopes yet find themselves short of their goal and frustrated, it is useful to review some fundamentals for fundraising success.

### Principle 1

The purpose of the campaign must be clearly defined and reflect the mission of the sponsoring organization.

The campaign leadership, campaign workers, and donors must readily understand why the fundraising effort is being conducted. Where will the campaign proceed go? What will be different as a result of the campaign's success? Never forget that fundraising is a means to an end. The sponsoring entity's values, vision and mission define the ends.

### Principle 2

The sponsoring entity must have an established legitimacy.

The sponsoring entity must meet generally accepted guidelines for non-profit operations. These include, but are not limited to: (1) legal incorporation as a nonprofit entity; (2) public reports about the agency's activities; (3) annual financial audits available to the public;

(4) governance by a board of volunteers who meet regularly and keep appropriate records of their actions; (5) conducting fundraising in an ethical and appropriate manner.

### Principle 3

There is goodwill toward the sponsoring entity among those who will be asked to contribute to the campaign.

As Gerald Soroker noted in his *Fundraising for Philanthropy*, "Where goodwill does not exist it takes several years of planning and careful attention to uncovering the source of previous problems before a major adjustment can be made."

### Principle 4

There is an available cadre willing and able to assume leadership roles in the campaign.

This is one of the most important principles. Credibility reigns supreme here. The right leadership, which reflects its mettle, is essential to sustained success.

This group of leaders needs to be open to new blood for the specific campaign as well as for the entire organization. Again, Soroker is on target when he notes, "...many an organization will come to an annual meeting and look for leadership only to find that no one will take the job or that it is necessary to go back to old leadership. One of the problems that arises comes from the desire of current leadership to retain control of the organization. It is sad indeed to see an agency with an excellent history of service ignore leadership development. This results often in a poor campaign response and an

eventual drying up of its program."

Every fundraising effort must start with the folks at the very core of the sponsoring entity. These "natural prospects" must be fully committed to the fundraising enterprise. They need to be willing to assume leadership roles. Even more critically, they must be willing to lead!

As the fundraising mantra goes, "people give to people." People give the most to others they believe and respect. Volunteers who have stepped up to the plate themselves have earned "speaking privileges." Without credibility there is no long-term success.

### Principle 5

There is an available and willing corps of volunteers to undertake the rigors of the fundraising effort; and this group needs to be representative of the donor group(s) to be solicited.

### Principle 6

There is a willingness and a patience to approach the fundraising enterprise systematically. Once defined, all leaders and workers adhere to the campaign plan and its fundraising strategies.

Crises do generate donations, but these are only short-term. All fundraising requires planning and proper campaign organization. There must be a willingness to stay the course, to do what experience proves results in fundraising success.

### Principle 7

There are available prospects with the resources to contribute to the campaign.

Just because an organization thinks it does good does not mean that there are donors willing to support its work.

**Fundraising, continued on page 35**

## Fundraising

(Continued from page 30)

Effort must be expended to develop as comprehensive a prospect list as possible. This requires what is known as "prospect research," a whole area in and of itself.

### Principle 8

There is constant emphasis on the "personal"—on the importance and role of each individual in ensuring the success of the campaign and the organization/cause.

Remembering that the fundraising enterprise is about engaging folks in your organization/cause puts the stress on being as personal as possible in all of the campaign's and organization's operations. Appreciation and recognition should flow freely among and between leaders, staff, workers and donors.

"Effective" fundraising means developing your prospects' interest in and support for your organization/cause. The more personal the approach, the more likely you are to build a sustained connection between your prospect(s) and the organization/cause.

H.L. Mencken is reputed to have said, "Some problems are so difficult they can't be solved in a million years, unless someone thinks about them for five minutes."

The next time you are involved in a fundraising campaign, take 10 minutes!

*Barry Silverberg has 23 years of leadership, management and communications experience as a professional and as a volunteer leader in nonprofit agencies, including 18 years as executive director of Jewish Federations in Syracuse, NY, and Austin, TX. He can be reached at bsaustin@aol.com*

*Note on 4/27/2020: This article was written 21 years ago. Barry Silverberg is now Director of the Center for Nonprofit Studies at Austin Community College. He can be reached at bsilverb@austincc.edu*