

Advancing Philanthropy

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ARE WE
THERE
YET?

*How the path of professionalism
in fundraising sometimes involves
taking the road less traveled*

The First to Give

BY ANNIE FRITSCHNER, ACFRE

Volunteering saved my life—or at least my soul. I was a miserable student all through grade school and high school, and the harder I worked and the more I studied, the worse my grades were. Then one day a teacher asked me if I would lead the school in Eco-day (shows my age) by organizing students to clean up our school grounds and the neighborhood. It was concrete, tangible and achievable, and I experienced a sense of self-worth I had not felt in my studies or at home. I was a new person who had value and skills and who could accomplish something. I felt valuable. I learned the absolute joy that comes from giving.

When I graduated from college, it was expected that I would move home, get married, have two or three attractive children and join the Junior League. I made it home to tell my family I wasn't returning, didn't get married for years and never had children. But I did join the Junior League. And I went to work as a fundraiser, first in politics, then higher education, then healthcare, then the arts and then grassroots organizations, all the while taking as many classes and seminars as were offered to me. I learned so much from the CASE Institute at Dartmouth College, and then I joined NSFRE. I have been a member of AFP since 1986 because it is the best organization for fundraisers who care about their ethics and want to practice their craft with honor.

Today there are numerous colleges and universities offering classes, conferences, advanced degrees and special areas of study. Hundreds of books are being published. However, fundraisers need something beyond knowledge and skills and degrees and certification. As anyone who serves on a non-



profit's board knows all too well, fundraisers must put their money where their hearts are before asking others to do the same thing.

We are servant leaders. We are changing the status quo and helping other donors achieve their personal, moral and philosophical goals by helping them find joy as supporters of causes that are meaningful to them.

Are fundraisers practitioners or tacticians? We are both, and more. Are we learning skills without really understanding the profession? I pray not. The more we give, the more often we give, the better we can understand our profession. Because the better we are as donors the better we will be as equal partners in making the world a better place. When we are donors, we are fundraisers with credibility, commitment and authority. That makes us servant leaders in a noble profession.

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important things, but they're missing the organizational culture aspect. If I could change one thing, it would be to provide training at all levels on how a constituent focus is critical for ensuring the success of the nonprofit and its mission.

"The underlying theme is professionalism and a market orientation," Fogel adds. "Whether you call yourself a practitioner or a tactician, the question to ask, prior to every decision, has to be, 'How will this affect our constituents?'"

In her introduction to Darian Rodriguez Heyman's *Non-profit Management 101: A Complete and Practical Guide for Leaders and Professionals* (Jossey-Bass, 2011), McManus addresses the issue of professionalism by offering a set of do's and don'ts on the relationship between fundraising and philanthropy, which includes these two points:

- "DO understand and promote the relationship between fundraising and philanthropy: *philanthropists need you*. This may well be the most important factor in your success."
- "DO find out why people give and what will interest a particular donor or donor group in your mission or what will motivate them to make a gift."

"Fundraising is an enabler of philanthropy," McManus writes. "Fundraising is important and meaningful work ... and it is work to be proud of, because it helps to change the world by making it a better place. But simply 'getting' this isn't enough. It's about working smarter, not harder."

Reflecting on what "smarter, not harder" will mean as the profession grows, McManus notes that it is a repetitious process. "In presentations, I talk a lot about the need for us to change our conversation," she says. "We can get so bogged down in talking about solicitations, annual appeals and donor acquisition. But we should be focusing on the philanthropic outcomes. We should be asking, 'What's our plan for growing philanthropy?' not 'What's our fundraising plan?' I think we need to continue to build our craft and hone our skills, but we also need to take a leadership role in connecting to the outcomes—because no one else is going to do it." 🗨️

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