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Friend Raising and Your Board Part Two

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In the last issue of Get engaged we spoke about about the idea of Friend Raising in Fund Raising please read on...

“Fundraising is About Relationships”

It is usually at this point that fundraisers smile and nod, and say, “I’ve been saying this all along. Fundraising is all about relationship building!”

And since I have already angered those who think boards should fundraise, I might as well anger those who believe that “Fundraising-is-About-Relationship-Building” is the same thing as raising real friends for an organization.

“Fundraising is about building relationships,” can be directly translated as follows:

If you don’t get to know people well, it is harder to ask them for money.

If you do get to know people well, it is easier to ask for money.

Therefore, you should get to know people really well, so it will be easier to ask them for money.

Does the word “friendship” or “relationship” really mean, “when the time is right, we will agree on a price”? Is that really what our organizations are about at their core? Can we really create impact in our community when community members know the only reason we might be nice to them is because we will eventually want their money?

We can now add to that phenomenon a more recent phenomenon - those fundraising approaches that encourage board members to invite their friends to an event where, “We will absolutely not ask anyone for a dime,” only to have those same friends invited to a hard-sell event a few months later, where they are told honestly and directly, “We will be asking you for money, and a lot of it!”

It is easy to see why board members tell us, “I don’t feel comfortable giving the names of my friends to the organization, as I know, in one form or another, my friends will be hit up for money.”

Money. We have so many emotional hang-ups about money. And every time we reinforce that “the point of having friends is so we can ask them for money - perhaps not now, but eventually...” - well, that just continues that pattern of board members feeling uncomfortable about sharing their precious friendships.

Board Members and FriendRaising

If the point of FriendRaising efforts is not to ask for money, then what is the point? It will sound trite, but the point of friendship is friendship. The point of engaging the community (which is really what FriendRaising is all about) is an engaged community.

Friends will not let anything bad happen to the organization. They will help in ways you never dreamed possible. They will want to see good things happen, and will work like the devil to be sure nothing bad happens.



Friends share all their gifts with the organization, and are thrilled that the organization sees value in those gifts! They give what they have, whatever that is - and yes, quite often, it is even money. But it is not only money. It is usually far more.

And that is because they are acting like real friends. That's the point. If we had an army of friends, we would have everything we currently have, plus tons more.

The only road to sustainability is to engage the community in your work, to turn that community into an army of friends, spreading the roots of ownership of your mission and vision throughout the community, so the community would not dream of letting your mission die. And as the link to the community, that is a job board members can do without fear.

FriendRaising

FriendRaising (a.k.a. Community Engagement) is a simple thing. It is rooted in celebrating all the various gifts every person has to share. Isn't that what we do with our friends? We overlook their faults, because they make us laugh; because they invite us over for pizza when we've had a bad day; because they think our kids are adorable (or understand when they're being not-so-adorable). We celebrate what is good in them, what is precious in them. And that's how we make friends for our organizations. We get to know people, and we tap into one of the most special gifts each of us has - the desire to make our communities better places to live.

So how do we do that? We ask them to become part of our circle, however they fit. We talk to them about our mission, and we ask for their opinions about our mission, their thoughts, their wisdom, their life experience. We share our stories, and we ask them to share theirs. And we celebrate the connections we find between their experience and our mission.

An Easy Strategy for Raising Friends

While we have used many FriendRaising strategies over the years, our favorite approach to engaging friends is what

we have come to call "Community Sleuthing" - engaging by asking questions. Whether we do our sleuthing over breakfast, during a tour, in someone's office, or in a group, we have not found a single strategy more effective than sleuthing for engaging someone directly in the heart of your mission and vision.

The process of sleuthing is deceptively simple for something so powerful. It has to do with briefly telling your story, and then asking questions that invite your friend to engage him/herself with the work you are doing.

The questions you ask will not include, "How can we raise money?" or "How can we get our name out there?" Those questions are of the "it's all about me" variety. They tend to lead to a lot of disengaged brainstorming, with little useful coming out of those discussions because they always circle back to money, and money is not a particularly engaging subject.

Think about these 2 scenarios in your personal life. You call your friend Joe and ask him to lunch to pick his brain about your own life.

"Joe, I need to make more money. I am talking to all my friends to figure out how I can do that. Do you have any ideas about how I can make more money?"

vs.

"Joe, I am trying to figure out how I can make more of a difference in the world. I am talking to all my friends, because I respect how you feel about the world, to get input about the various ways I might be able to make more of a difference. I am thinking about volunteering, and I enjoy being with kids, but I'm not sure where to start. You have kids - can we talk a little about what kids need these days, and where you see our community's needs regarding kids? What are you seeing with your own kids? Their friends? Their schools?"

Which is the conversation that will keep Joe engaged with your options, long after you have spoken? Which is the line of questioning that will keep Joe thinking about your situation while he is driving home from the office, or over dinner that night with his wife, or while he is digging in the garden that weekend?