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ACCELERATING SOCIAL INNOVATION

Overcoming Board Fundraising Excuses

By Nell Edgington



It's a point of debate in the nonprofit sector whether all board members of a nonprofit should be required to help raise money. Bill Ryan (co-author of the book [Governance as Leadership](#)) [argued](#) that the fundraising requirement of many nonprofit boards is "a giant, fast-growing myth that ends up choking good governance to death." And I often hear from nonprofit leaders and board members that requiring every single board member to participate in money-generating activities just isn't realistic. I strongly disagree. I'm a firm believer in a give/get requirement for every board.

But, that doesn't mean that every board member must ask donors for money. Rather, a nonprofit must take a strategic approach to employing at least some of every board member's time toward bringing money in the door. And there are many things board members can do, beyond making an ask, to raise money (which is the subject of an upcoming post). But first, nonprofits have to move beyond their many excuses for why every board member can't help raise money.

Here are the some of the most common excuses and why they don't fly:

- ***"We want client representation on our board, but our clients don't have money."***
Even though a client may not have access to large pools of money, they can still absolutely help bring money in the door. Because they have been helped by the organization, they can provide an amazing testimonial to potential donors about the impact of the organization. Why not take that client board member on some meetings with prospects? Their presence and their story might be enough to turn a prospect into a donor.
- ***"We need a specific skill set (legal, marketing, policy expertise) and those board members may not have a network that can give."***
A board member who doesn't count potential major donors among their friends still has networks to draw from. Everyone has co-workers, clients, vendors, neighbors, family, and/or social media

followers. When you start to ask your board to systematically think through who they know, you would be surprised about how vast your organization's potential network is. Just because a board member doesn't know the list of 50 donors every other nonprofit in town is going after, doesn't mean they don't know people.

- ***“Some board members aren't good at fundraising.”***

Actually the vast majority of people aren't good at fundraising because it isn't widely understood. But so what? Provide your board some [fundraising training](#) and have them practice on each other. Then pair greener board members with more seasoned ones to help them learn. Or ask another friendly nonprofit to have some of their effective board members come talk about their experiences raising money.

- ***“Some board members are uncomfortable with asking for money.”***

Yep. Actually most people are uncomfortable asking for money. Money is a taboo subject in our society. But instead of viewing money as a dirty thing, start viewing it as [a critical component of the work your nonprofit does](#). Reframe money as a great, necessary opportunity to help your organization do more and better. Bring everyone's discomfort with money out into the open and turn it something positive. Get the board excited about raising more money so that more can be accomplished.

- ***“We want board members with program expertise to focus on mission, not money.”***

I suppose in an ideal world it would be great if you could have mission without money, but that is just not the reality. Your organization does not have endless resources. Money is limited and therefore your programs and activities must be limited by an understanding of that resource. A board member cannot adequately discuss or plan for programs without intimate knowledge of and experience with the money that makes those programs run. [You simply cannot separate the two](#). And the sooner you get those “program experts” contributing to the financial bottomline of the organization, the sooner you will have stronger, more sustainable programs.

Money is what makes a nonprofit and its work viable. It makes no sense to say that some board members should help bring it in and others should be excused. We have got to stop separating money, and the activities associated with it, from other aspects of a nonprofit organization. It makes no sense.

If you want help making your board more effective, download the “[10 Traits of a Groundbreaking Board](#)” e-book.

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[How to Deal When Your Nonprofit Board Makes Fundraising Excuses - Nonprofit Hub](#)

January 27, 2012

[...] Overcoming Board Fundraising Excuses [Edgington/Social Velocity] 0 Comments [...]

[Lorraine Arams](#)

February 15, 2012

I totally agree with you! One of the main purposes of being on a board of directors is to support the organization and the work it does. The main element of that support is money.

People should only be joining a board because they believe in the cause and want to help. If people are passionate about the organization's mission, then it should be easy to fundraise for anyone since, without money, there is no organization, no service to clients and, for that matter, no need for a board of directors. I loved the way you addressed the "excuses"!

[9 Ways Board Members Can Raise Money Without Fundraising : Monroe-Bibb Family Connection](#)

February 21, 2012

[...] admit it, I've been on a board fundraising kick lately in the blog (here and here). I just think that if your nonprofit is going to become more strategic and financially [...]

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