

Ten steps for hiring an effective fundraiser!

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Does this situation I am about to describe sound familiar to you?

A charity CEO, or an Operations Director calls me up and invites me to review their fundraising. As we assess the fundraising activities and their performance he or she says: *‘We had to let go of our fundraiser last year. It didn’t work out. Now we need a new fundraiser. What can we do to get the right person for the job?’*

During the last eight years, I have helped several Christian charities hire fundraising staff from new fundraisers to experienced fundraising directors. So, here are some steps for you to follow in order to find an effective fundraiser.

- 1. Understand today’s charity market.** Most charities have realised that they can’t function without effective fundraisers so they are in high demand! Often there are more attractive fundraising jobs out there than good fundraisers to fill them. If you want to attract a gifted fundraiser you need to ask yourself: what is it about your charity/ your cause that might appeal to a good fundraiser? Make a list of these qualities and make sure you include them in your job adverts.

In addition to highlighting good qualities you shouldn’t forget to offer a competitive salary and benefits package. Get a copy of the *Third Sector* magazine, or look at their advertising pages online to see the kind of salary packages being offered by other charities for different fundraising roles. This is always a good place to start.

- 2. Jot down a description of your ideal fundraiser.** What skills and experience do you think they should have? Involve other people including the CEO and other senior leaders in the discussion – get their opinions too, because they will be working closely with the fundraiser on a daily basis.

In my experience, good fundraisers are ‘people persons.’ Also, they are willing to ask for money – unlike most of your other charity employees!

Effective fundraisers know how to set goals and work towards fulfilling them. They are always on the lookout for opportunities to introduce your charity to new donors and to convert them to supporters.

Good fundraisers are friendly, confident and inspiring people. They are not afraid to set measurable goals and (this is very important) they are not afraid to fail and learn from their mistakes.

- 3. Determine what kind of fundraising you want to do.** There are many ways to fundraise such as: direct mail, major donor fundraising, corporate fundraising, events and sponsorships, trust fundraising, churches fundraising etc. Despite what you may think or want, nobody can do everything.

So, before you begin the hiring process ask yourself: *What are the top two or three (at the most) fundraising strategies we should focus on?* - Once you have got an answer to this question you can hire for the right skills and personality mix and get the type of fundraiser that will make things happen.

- 4. Write the job description.** I strongly recommend that you get some help with this, especially if your charity is hiring its first fundraiser or, if you have been unable to retain fundraising staff.

A common mistake in job descriptions is unrealistic expectations where one fundraiser is responsible for direct mail, legacy giving, trusts giving, corporate sponsorships, churches campaigns and everything else. If the management expects the fundraiser to be spread too thin nothing will get done well.

Another common mistake is not having any fundraising goals in the job description. The wording is full of warm and fuzzy statements like 'you will strengthen donor relations', 'help us achieve ministry goals by working together,' 'communicate the vision..' - this is great stuff but, there is no mention of 'money,' or of the fact that the fundraiser will be responsible for achieving specific fundraising targets.

- 5. Advertise in the right places.** This is especially true for Christian charities whose job specifications for fundraisers are often narrower than those of other charities.

My advice is - don't spend a lot of money on advertising in publications that are not read by fundraisers. I had a charity client once who was advertising fundraising jobs in a youth magazine. How many fundraisers would look at the job section of a youth magazine? Hardly any, youth workers would read those pages - fundraisers no.

Target your resources to publications fundraisers read, or websites they are likely to visit. Our monthly e-briefing goes to over 500 Christian fundraisers and communications staff in the UK. We are always happy to advertise jobs

through the e-briefing and our website for a small fee. Get in touch to find out how we can help you.

Ask your regional Institute of Fundraising group or Fundraisers in Christian Organisations (FICO) to send your job adverts out with their emails. Display your job advert on **Christian Fundraisers Forum** page on *facebook* and **Christian Professionals** pages on *LinkedIn*. Look for other fundraising specific publications or websites.

6. Don't wait for advertising to do it (all) for you! Work your contacts list and e-mail address book. Tell everyone you know that your charity is hiring. It is a 'shrinking' market out there, especially when it comes to fundraising, so get the word out through various channels not just through the Human Resources staff member.

7. Invite a fundraising professional to participate in the hiring process.

A fundraising professional can help you evaluate potential candidates to determine whether they can deliver on the various aspects of the job description, or whether they know what they claim to know on their CV.

We are happy to help your charity with this. Over the years, we have helped various Christian charities to sort out the 'wheat from the chaff' by evaluating candidate's CVs, checking their references, preparing questions and case studies for interviews, etc.

8. How to interview your future fundraiser. Once you have received and evaluated CVs of potential candidates you are likely to invite the best ones for the first interview.

The questions you ask during the first interview should help you determine whether the candidate know what they claim to know on their CV and whether they have the right skills set and attitudes for the job.

I often look for three things during such interviews:

- Do the candidates have the necessary skills needed?
- If they have fundraising experience can they show through examples how they raised money, how much and in what ways?
- What was their biggest fundraising failure and what have they learnt from it?

After evaluating potential candidate's skills and performance, those involved in hiring decisions should consider the personality fit between the fundraiser and others in the team. After all, the CEO and other senior managers will need to work with this fundraiser on a regular basis. They should be able to get on, to respect and trust each other.

Before making the final decision, it is as good idea to bring back the best candidates for a second interview. Involve other team members and trustees in

this process and see how they present themselves and whether they are right for the job.

- 9. Be patient! Don't offer the job to a mediocre fundraiser.** If the candidates you interviewed were not right for the job, keep looking. Don't offer the job to a mediocre person or to someone who is not likely to be a good personality fit. If you do, you will end up wasting precious resources and even losing team members who might not want to work with an incompetent or annoying colleague.

So, don't lose your nerve. Be persistent with the hiring process and keep looking.

- 10. Be prepared to accept people with limited fundraising experience, but with a great track record in another profession.** Some of the best fundraisers I know came from marketing, advertising, journalism, teaching or even foreign languages departments.

What they have in common is a desire to understand people and to work with people, a strong sense of personal responsibility to get the job done and the ability to work well under pressure and meet deadlines. A person with such qualities can become a great fundraiser with some training and mentoring. So, it is better to get them on board rather than a poor quality fundraiser.

Following these insights will help you find the right fundraiser for the job and minimize the risks of choosing the wrong person.

Just one more thing – **once you have hired your fundraiser make sure that he or she plays a key role on your management team.** Give them all the support and encouragement you can. Listen to them, respect them and involve them in developing your charity's overall strategy. This way they will feel appreciated as key players and less likely to respond to offers from other charities looking for really good fundraisers.