

What Makes Fundraising Teams GREAT!

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The things that make Fundraising Teams GREAT are much the same as the things that make teams anywhere GREAT, in the world of business or sports. The difference is the focus of our work. In fundraising, the focus is to Find - Win - Keep - and Lift the Right Kinds of Donors.

Now, if you're thinking that building your team means adding more junior staff in the fundraising department to carry out your orders then STOP and THINK AGAIN.

The first notion to correct is that fundraising is a departmental function, it is an **organisational** function. Second, not everyone on your team is a junior. GREAT fundraising teams bring together people at **all levels** of your organisation. At its best, fundraising involves everyone in the work of Finding - Winning - Keeping-and Lifting the Right Kinds of Donors.

What makes teams GREAT it's first of all about the qualities of *people who do the work*, and second, about the culture, structures, and systems of the *organisations where they work*. And it's also about looking forward, about having *vision*.

My top 10 picks for What Makes Fundraising Teams GREAT are:

1. Competent and forward-looking, courageous leadership
2. The right people
3. A vision that everyone is passionate about
4. Embracing change
5. Not obsessing on what you can't change
6. Empowering people with a plan and resources to carry it out
7. Excellent communication
8. Measuring what matters
9. Granting permission to fail
10. Persistent consistency

Many books have been written on these topics. Most of the ideas are interrelated and can be applied to fundraising teams. Lest we think there is some quick fix or magic formula, a word of caution from Jim Collins, author of

the bestseller, *Good to GREAT*, is worth remembering: “*In building a great institution, there is no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no miracle moment.*”

Developing GREAT teams is a matter of doing the right things over and over, keeping the faith, gathering momentum, and never being satisfied.

Competent, forward-looking and courageous leadership

Leadership is obviously more than authority granted by title or position. But, what makes a GREAT Leader? When the question is asked, four characteristics are most often repeated:

- Honest
- Inspirational
- Forward-looking
- Competent

Honest Leaders are trustworthy, and they build trust in their teams. Without it, team members lose heart, no matter how worthwhile the pursuit. Without trust, donors will not make substantial gifts.

Inspirational: While trust is key to a Leader’s ability to inspire followers, he must also engage their minds and hearts. Collins, in *Good to GREAT*, says, “*If people follow you because they have no choice, then you are not leading.*”

Donors always have a choice. And while you can buy the time of your staff members, you cannot buy their hearts. And staff members also have a choice ... they can sell their time to someone else.

Forward-Looking & Competent: If a Leader is going to engage the hearts and minds of his followers, he must paint the picture of a better world. And he must provide direction on the changes needed to get there. If he doesn’t know these things, he has neither the competence nor the vision to lead anyone anywhere.

These four characteristics have clear importance and inter-relationship. Three more “honourable mentions” are: Courage, Consideration, and Humility.

Courage balanced with Consideration is required to have ‘Win – Win’ pursuits, according to Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Think about it. Can you imagine a leader with no courage ***in relentless pursuit of a better world?*** Not anymore than you can imagine a leader who cared nothing for anyone ***in relentless pursuit of a better world.*** It takes both.

It takes courage to ask tough questions and make tough decisions. Courage doesn’t mean being fearless, it means you do the right thing despite your fear. And balancing courage with consideration means you do the right things while

demonstrating that you care for people, the team, your donors and beneficiaries.

Humility: As for true humility, it inspires others to follow. On a divine scale, think of the life of Jesus. On a human scale, consider Frances Hesselbein, CEO of the Girl Scouts. When a reporter asked her what it felt like to be on top of such a large organization, she said, *“I’m not on top of anything.”* She described her idea of power as inclusion, shared interest, and coalition.

On the need for humility, Collins says, *“The moment you think of yourself as great, your slide toward mediocrity will have already begun.”*

The right people

Collins calls it “getting the right people on the bus,” and he says it’s the most important thing. He votes for people with an “almost neurotic need to improve.” They’re likely to have self-motivation and self-discipline. Select these results-loving people who are fired up with passion and commitment for your cause. They will relentlessly pursue a better world, and they are also likely to attract the “right kinds” of donors.

You want people who are productive and share your high values and ethics. If you select highly productive people with low values, you’ll get win-at-any-cost types who cheat and run over people. If you select laid-back people who buy into your values, you get nice people who don’t get anything done. Either one will drag your team down.

A vision that everyone is passionate about

Burt Nanus in *Visionary Leadership* said, *“There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future, widely shared.”*

Your vision has to move people emotionally. Logic alone is not enough to move people to act in substantial ways. And you need substantial, sacrificial acts from your Fundraising Team and your Donors to change reality to match your vision of a better world.

Embracing change

Years ago, Harvard researched how people respond to change at work. They found that 25% heavily resisted and 15% openly embraced change. That left 60% riding the fence, in effect saying, “maybe I will, and maybe I won’t.” Harvard researchers looked harder at the two smaller groups. I call them Change Lovers and Change Haters. They wanted to know which one was most productive at work. Who got higher results?

The pattern was clear. Change Haters were 60% productive — 40% below industry standards. Change Lovers were 100% productive — they were the star performers who SET the standard by which everyone else was measured.

The Harvard researchers were curious they wanted to know if they could budge performance of the two groups by lavishing extra training and incentives on them. In each workplace, they applied the same “pressures” to perform at a higher level.

The results were astounding. Change Haters, who had lots of room to grow, improved their performance by a measly 3%. But how much higher could the Change Lovers go? Weren't they already at the top of the game?

Wahoo! Change Lovers went 25% higher. They set a new, much higher standard. They were the people Collins described as having an “almost neurotic need to improve.”

What are the morals of this story? First, select Change Lovers for your fundraising team. And don't leave well enough alone, because you think they're as good as it gets. Give them incentives to be GREAT, and they'll touch the sky!

Jettison Change Haters, free up their futures for time-honoured, never changing occupations, for they are chains on fulfilling your organisation's vision. And worse, they poison other people against you. Remember that 60% riding the fence. They're listening to hear if this change you want is worthwhile, and the people doing most of the talking are the Change Haters. What else would they be doing with the 40% of their time they aren't productive?

So, get your own PR communications in favour of change going to the 60% who are influence-able. Don't neglect them, or the Change Haters will win them over.

Not obsessing on what you can't change

“Every institution has its constraints,” Collins says, “Yet some make a leap while others *facing the same challenges* do not. This is perhaps the single most important point in all of *Good to Great*.”

People tend to “obsess on systematic constraints,” even when they see no solution or don't expect it for decades. Hospitals blame Medicare and the insurance companies for their problems. Airlines blame fuel costs and deregulation.

Local charities blamed 9/11 when they didn't meet their fund raising goals, and then blamed the tsunami disaster, and then the hurricanes. Collins encourages us to face the brutal facts of reality, and then ask the question, **“What are you going to do now?”**

“Greatness is not a function of circumstance,” He adds, “Greatness is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline.”

Every leader, team, even donors, should know your constraining factors. Vision, courage, and faith allow us to stake a deliberate course to move forward anyway. God has every breakthrough in His hands, and we have the power of appeal to Him in prayer. (Romans 8:31)

Empowering people with a plan and the resources to carry it out

A plan tells people what results are expected, and it provides direction for how to get them. An orchestra conductor could announce plans to play a specific musical composition at the next concert. But, his plan would be incomplete without sheet music. Sheet music is needed for each musician to play his unique instrument and part, to practice individually and to rehearse together.

Team assignments are similar to sheet music. Every team member needs to know the expectations for their work and how it relates to other team members' work.

The Leader's job is to facilitate the team's success through training, coaching, and encouragement and to remove obstacles to their success, whenever possible. That includes making sure that team members have the authority and resources needed to carry out the plan.

Excellent communications

For a development team to be great, communication within the team, as well as with donors, must be a cut above.

Communication is a relationship-building function, part and parcel to fundraising as a relationship-building function. Most communications go beyond just imparting information to have additional purposes to:

- teach
- encourage
- solicit
- persuade
- illustrate
- recognise
- inspire
- clarify
- remind
- explain
- interpret
- recruit

Without effective communication, there is no buy-in, direction, performance feedback or accountability. All of these are important to leaders, team members, and donors. And the greater dependence you have on team members and donors, the greater is your mandate for great communication. Here are some wonderful jobs that great communication accomplishes:

- Developing buy-in to a shared vision of a better world
- Establishing trust in the leader, therefore encouraging *following* within the team.
- Setting direction and managing the process of change
- Empowering and encouraging team members

Finally, there is the simple truth spoken by my friend Peter Herschend, philanthropist and co-founder of Herschend Family Entertainment.. He says, “*Communication can happen without fundraising, but fundraising never happens without communication.*”

Measuring what really matters

Although not everything your fundraising team does needs to be measured you might want to isolate the critical few things that really matter and measure those. As Larry Johnston puts it you’ll know if you’ve identified the right things, if:

- Success in these areas means failure elsewhere probably won’t matter.
- Failure in these areas renders success in any other area unimportant.

The need to measure is linked to every point presented thus far – from making plans to empowering people. Johnston concludes his case for the science of measurement by stating:

1. If you can’t measure something, you can’t understand it.
2. If you can’t understand it, you can’t control it.
3. If you can’t control it, you can’t improve it.

Create a measurement ethic, if something matters, you need to know if it’s working or not.

Granting people permission to fail

Everybody likes success, innovation, and creative programmes. And as you might expect the idea of failure isn’t very popular. Yet failure is inherent in the pursuit of change, improvement, and innovation. On the other hand, playing it safe — avoiding mistakes at all costs — seldom leads to greatness.

Making mistakes is not a crime. Here’s the key, *seize the opportunity to learn from mistakes*. Being willing to accept some failure within your team can encourage them to keep learning and improving.

If pride leads you to stick on a bad decision or to make the same mistake repeatedly, you compound the problem by dragging it out. So, be humble enough to admit mistakes, but not too fearful to try again. Remember that failure is temporary and giving up makes it permanent.

Persistent consistency

“Consistency distinguishes the truly great,” Collins says in Good to GREAT, “Consistent intensity of effort ... consistency over time.”

The great value of persistent consistency is, of course, being consistent about doing the right things. Collins says it requires “piercing clarity about how to produce the best long-term results.” And it requires the discipline to say NO to things that take you off course.

Faith is key - for it strengthens you to push through days when the fruit of your labour is not evident.

There are days like that in the business of Finding – Winning – Keeping – and Lifting the Right Kinds of Donors. But, don’t stop. Keep an intelligent, consistent direction, and momentum will build. The speed of results will pick up. Your investment compounds, and at some point you break through to Greatness.

Our experience of working with CEO’s and senior managers to build effective teams could enhance your abilities for building a GREAT fundraising team.

To find out how we can help you build an effective fundraising team contact us at: info@mcconkey-johnston.co.uk