

In his book about major gifts, Sturtevant reminds us of the philosophy that we as board, staff, and professional fundraisers should keep in mind when embarking on the process of raising funds. This book is one of the best we've seen on the topic of major gifts and we highly recommend it.

"The Tenets and Principles of a Fundraising Philosophy" from *The Artful Journey: Cultivating and Soliciting the Major Gift*

By William T. Sturtevant

- *The good fundraisers truly believe in the cause and organization they serve.* There can be little question you will be far happier in your work if you believe in your cause. I also think you will be more effective if this is so. The sincerity and strength of purpose which come from an abiding belief in an organization become apparent to prospective donors.
- *The successful fundraiser always makes paramount interests of his or her donors.* It is important that this be more than "lip service." Without hesitation the professional fundraiser must recommend against gifts which are not in the best interests of a given donor, and it is vital that institutional and volunteer leaders be supportive in this. The important organizations deserve to be represented in just this fashion. Once again, the ethos of an organization shines through.
- *The effective fundraiser spends less time worrying about competition for the philanthropic dollar and more time considering how to communicate the unique case for support of the organization being served.* Personally, I believe it is in poor taste to sell against other organizations. Why would you want to dissuade someone from making a gift to a worthy organization? If we are good we will always do well enough, and it is certainly true that our organizations will secure support because their cases compel it.
- *The good fundraiser never projects his or her organization to be something it isn't in order to secure a gift.* Nor should you ever apologize for the organization being what it is. Forgetting the ethical and moral issues, if we pretend about organizational positions we won't likely win over strong nonprospects and we may just offend our adherents. Obviously, extreme views never hold the biggest audience, but what we are talking about is differentiating your particular case to identified market segments. I also believe it's important to have the courage to stand firm on issues of importance to our institutional philosophy. For example, we must feel comfortable in turning down controversial gifts or those with too high a price tag.
- *The successful development professional manages the enterprise as if he or she means business.* Without dedication to be the best we can be – the quest to excel – we run the risk of underserving our vital missions.
- *Giving is top heavy.* This is not likely to change. When I first landed in the development business I was told that 80 percent of the gifts come from 20 percent of the donor base. In reality, it is closer to 90 percent coming from 10 percent. Sometimes the smaller fundraising effort is a bit more egalitarian, but this principle is consistently verified by major campaign results.

- *Major gifts fundraising is more art than science.* This principle is important because once accepted you become more effective. By accepting the fact that major gifts fundraising is largely an art you acknowledge that there is more than one path to the same successful outcome. Further, you automatically assume a probing rather than a telling approach. You also learn to seek input from many sources, discounting liberally, in developing your strategy, and the outcome is usually much better. Accepting this verity leads you to a reliance on your instincts and judgment, and this, too, will render you more effective as a fundraiser.
- *As a corollary to the above, everyone is a fundraising expert.* It is easy to ignore the professional fundraiser. Recognizing that the process is more art than science helps because you accept the premise that sometimes the nonprofessional will be correct in his or her assessment. We should be open to and not feel threatened by the observations we receive from the nonprofessional. Indeed, input from bright and dedicated people can only be positive.
- *Major gifts fundraising efforts are significantly enhanced when top institutional and volunteer leaders are involved.* What I hope to convey is that the fundraiser is not always the key personality and that those who formulate and nurture the institution's vision can often compel involvement. Certainly, these influential people send a strong message to our prospective donors. If there is a vision of importance to our top leaders, then it often becomes adopted by our prospective donors. We will enhance our opportunities for success with the 10 percent who can give 90 percent if we think carefully about the involvement of volunteer and institutional leaders.
- *Donors give to organizations they believe in – whose aspirations they share – not to needy causes.* Let's expunge the term "needs" from our fundraising vocabulary. People do not give because our organizations need the money. In fact, organizations don't really have needs. The beneficiaries of our services certainly have needs, but even here it is better to sell the outcome in terms of a changed or saved life. This principle helps explain why successful organizations continue to reach greater fundraising heights. Donors don't wish to be associated with a sinking ship. Rather, they want to support well-managed organizations which efficiently accomplish shared visions. Pleading needs is ineffective from a fundraising standpoint. We can surely find something more compelling to discuss with our prospects.
- *The stewardship function – reporting on the use of gifts and administering irrevocable planned gifts – is too often given short shrift at our organizations.* This is a critical function from an ethical and legal standpoint, but it's even more vital in terms of fundraising implications. Our best prospects are contented donors, and effective stewardship is a superb cultivational tool.

Adapted with permission from William Sturtevant, *The Artful Journey* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1997), 5-11.
© 1997 Bonus Books.

Suzanne Callahan, CFRE, Founder
Callahan Consulting for the Arts, LLC. Washington, DC 20009 TEL 202.955.8325
EMAIL callahan@ForTheArts.org