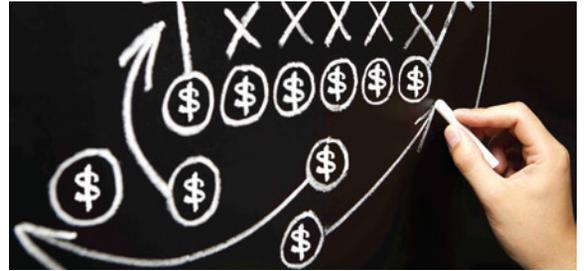


# Coaching for Fundraising Success

Finding the right fundraising talent may be easier than nonprofits think — with the right training

by Richard Tollefson



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## UP NEXT MONTH:

When and Why to Engage Fundraising Consultants



## THE BEST FUNDRAISING COACHING ...

- Is flexible and adaptable to the rigor and uncertainty that leaders in the fundraising profession face each day.
- Offers a blend of practical knowledge and easy-to-follow processes that can help establish benchmarks and accountabilities for the team.
- Includes a mix of national and local perspective to guide thinking.

—Kristin Priscella, chief operating officer for external affairs, Arizona Science Center



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► Though they possess innate fundraising instincts and a passion for their nonprofit missions, Kristin Priscella and Annet Ruitter admit they weren't necessarily born fundraisers. Priscella, Arizona Science Center's chief operating officer for external affairs, started within her organization in a marketing capacity. Ruitter, vice president of external affairs for Planned Parenthood Arizona Inc. and Planned Parenthood Advocates of Arizona, began her career as a Planned Parenthood volunteer and healthcare assistant.

Today, both oversee development functions within their nonprofits, and both participated in fundraising coaching before assuming their respective roles.

"Sometimes an individual in your organization will have excellent passion, and the instincts are there, but they don't have the expertise and skill," says Ruitter. "That is when you want to invest in coaching."

Says Priscella, "Grant writing, proposal development, the art of the pitch, gift tree structure, annual fund tactics — these can all be taught. If you have a candidate — internally or externally — with the innate skills, fundraising training can be transformational to them and the organization."

While some of these skills can and *should* be learned through coursework and seminars offered by professional fundraising organizations, both women say that individual coaching was most valuable.

"When I promoted Kristin, I knew that for her to excel in the role, she would need to learn to work smarter, not harder, and that it would require personalized and intensive training," says Chevy Humphrey, president and CEO of Arizona Science Center. "The benefits have been extraordinary."

Priscella's year-long coaching included day-to-day support from a team of mentors with national and community connections and more than 50 years of shared fundraising experience. Ruitter's coaching was similar.

"I was able to test my assumptions and bring my questions to professionals with a rich fundraising history," says Ruitter. "It helped build my confidence, and I felt 100 percent safe to ask what I wanted. With a contract-bound, confidential coaching

relationship versus a community mentorship, I think you can be more open."

"The fundraising community is changing rapidly," says Priscella, "and the role and expectations of good fundraisers are shifting. As a result, we need to be acutely aware of local trends, national influencers and the next wave of transition. Learning from coaches who are watching national and local industry best-practices closely is the most valuable type of training."

Concerned about coaching costs? Planned Parenthood Arizona CEO Bryan Howard points to employee turnover when coaching *isn't* part of the equation. He suggested and supported Ruitter's individualized coaching curriculum. "Nonprofits benefit when we retain and invest in existing talent. Bringing outsiders up to speed when you lose existing talent — and especially in development, we know that donors mostly give for two reasons: affinity for the mission, but also because of their trust in the relationships — will have an impact on the bottom line."

Ruitter, incidentally, won the 2015 Planned Parenthood Development Officer Conference Award as fundraiser of the year — testament, she says, to the fundraising coaching she received. "Had I not had the mentorship and the skill-building and confidence that came with it, I wouldn't have made it eight years in fundraising." She believes the correct training can lead to longevity for fundraising professionals and stability for the nonprofits they serve.

"The most successful for-profit companies invest in their employees at a very high rate," says Humphrey. "They give them the training, tools and ongoing support they need to best serve the company. Why should nonprofits act any differently — especially when our 'shareholders' are the communities we serve?" ■

## What components should a coaching curriculum include?

### 1. Customization

Is the fundraising professional's weakness in major gifts, marketing communications, or board and community engagement? A successful curriculum addresses specific needs. It is not one-size-fits-all.

### 2. One-on-One Sessions

Regularly scheduled meetings with experienced fundraisers (coaches) allow for trouble shooting of current concerns and aid in professional growth.

### 3. Skills Training

Has the new development professional organized a special event or applied for grants? Does he know how to establish and measure accountabilities for his fundraising team? Coaching should address standard fundraising practices.

### 4. Networking Opportunities

Local and national fundraising mentors should be identified as part of the curriculum, along with a proposed mentor meeting agenda.

### 5. Coursework and Resource Recommendations

Recommended fundraising resources — books, online resources and professional organizations — are invaluable to emerging development leaders.



After completing fundraising coaching, Mark Saville, director of development at Arizona Opera, doubled the nonprofit's donor base his first year, exceeded all budgeted goals and achieved the highest contributed revenue in the company's 44-year history. Arizona Opera has since been named "the best comeback in the arts" for Phoenix.