

**CEO Key in Fundraising**

Collaborative Leadership is the term for leadership that is generated and sustained by the CEO. This is one of the four key pillars of fundraising success, according to Peter Smits, senior consultant with The Phoenix Philanthropy Group and Senior Fellow at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, who has spent years studying the key characteristics of an organizational "culture of philanthropy."

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► Today's nonprofit CEOs and presidents are expected to set the strategic direction of the organization, ensure organizational efficiency and accountability, inform and be answerable to the board and key stakeholders, and serve as the public face of the organization. With so much on their plate, it may seem logical to delegate the responsibility for fund development to the chief development officer (CDO). That is their job, after all, right?

While that may be true, confining fundraising within the development department can be a significant mistake. A donor's decision to give, and to give repeatedly, often depends on the overall spirit of the organization. This spirit — which is comprised of an organization's vision, values and culture — is what creates the environment that enables and sustains giving. More than any other executive, it is the CEO who creates and sustains this positive environment, and who, consequently, is critical to the fundraising process.

Despite this, it should come as no surprise that many CEOs are not optimizing their role as "chief fundraiser." Some intentionally shy away from the role due to fear. Others try to overcome their discomfort by forcing themselves to adopt a fundraising persona that is entirely unnatural. Neither scenario benefits the organization or the development team and can even be counterproductive to fundraising success.

It doesn't have to be this way. Every CEO, regardless of personality or experience, can become an effective fundraiser.

**#1: One Size Does NOT Fit All**

Every chief executive is different. Each embodies different strengths, weaknesses, interests and fears — and the successful ones embrace this diversity of personality, rather than shying away from it. The same principle applies to fundraising. Forget any preconceived notions about what a fundraising CEO is or is not supposed to be. Finding and optimizing the ideal fundraising role is a reflective process — one that involves a degree of blunt honesty. An organization is best served by a CEO who knows what she is — and is not — good at and crafts her fundraising identity accordingly.

**#2: Develop a Close Partnership with the Chief Development Officer**

The CEO should not be alone in this reflective process. The chief development officer represents more than just another C-suite-level advisor. The CDO is both a partner and resource that the CEO can lean on to discover her ideal fundraising role

and then to optimize it. An excellent CDO will recognize the unique talents and expertise the CEO possesses and how these can be employed to the greatest impact. Together, this partnership can have transformational results for an organization's fundraising performance.

Solidifying this relationship will take effort and patience. Sherri Mylott, vice president of university advancement at the University of La Verne, emphasizes that this process is reciprocal, with give and take on both sides. "Our president makes the effort to write contact reports after meeting with prospects, which simplifies my job immensely. In return, we in the advancement office always try to remain a step ahead of her in the fundraising process, allowing the president to remain focused and on track."

**#3: Prioritize an Organization-Wide Culture of Philanthropy**

The CEO should not just consider her own fundraising identity, but also that of the organization as a whole. Everyone, from program officers to the board of directors, plays a role in the fundraising process — and the most successful organizations are the ones that not only recognize this, but take steps to optimize its potential. The CEO can supercharge this process by creating an atmosphere of collaborative leadership and philanthropic purpose. This can include any activity that helps to bring fundraising beyond the walls of the development office and infuses everyone with passion and purpose for fundraising success. At the University of La Verne, Mylott says this open and philanthropic atmosphere has had a transformative impact on fundraising success: "President Lieberman, though a very strategic thinker herself, always ensures that there is space for everyone to contribute. She makes sure that ideation and strategy development is a highly collaborative process."

**#4: Engage Outside Counsel to Help**

Often, the above advice is more easily acknowledged than acted upon. This is especially true when either the CEO or CDO is new to the organization. When in doubt, engaging outside counsel can help smooth the transition and ensure that the onboarding process lays the foundation for a healthy working relationship. Additionally, in situations where counsel has been previously engaged by the organization, counsel can help to provide a historical link and bridge any knowledge gaps, thereby eliminating landmines or wasted time on repetitive conversations and issues that were previously resolved. ■

