

“I Want to Be a Fundraiser”

by Rob Spykstra, Veritas Academy

Imagine for a moment the following conversation between Aunt Helen visiting for Christmas and her eight-year-old nephew: “So Johnny, what do you want to be when you grow up?” He curtly replies, “I want to be fundraiser.” “Did you say a fundraiser? Don’t you want to be a fireman or professional football player?” she asks with curiosity. “No, I want to be a fundraiser, you know, raise funds for non-profits.” Aunt Helen sits speechless. Johnny’s parents are considering counseling for their son.

Most fundraisers did not have Johnny’s foresight. Most of my colleagues came to their position out of a passion for the organization. Many reluctantly took on what no one else wanted to do—ask for money. Can someone who didn’t set out to be a fundraiser, or who has reluctantly put their hand to this particular plow, become a great fundraiser? Yes, great fundraisers are not born, but they can be made. And what makes a great fundraiser also makes a great development program.

There are five characteristics to a great development program and a great development officer.

The first characteristic is one that is completely outside of our control: favor, God’s favor. A great fundraising program is one which recognizes that God is the mover of hearts, thus absolutely dependent upon God’s favor. Paul declared to the Athenians, “God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth . . . gives to all mankind life and breath and everything in it” (Acts 17:24, 25). The acknowledgement of God’s

sovereign care for everything is a sound foundation for every fundraiser and development program. It is a protection against both pride and despair—pride

favor, a development officer will deepen his or her understanding and confidence in their school. Each of our schools has a particular history, culture, and distinctive

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when a substantial gift arrives unexpectedly in the mail, or despair when after spending months cultivating a relationship, we hear the word “no” to our request.

But if we are dependent upon God’s inscrutable favor, is there anything we can do? Yes, a development officer is a person of prayer, and appeals for others to pray. At Veritas we daily pray that God will move individuals to support Christian education and particularly classical Christian education. We ask our faculty and staff, our board, our parents, and friends of the school to pray for this favor. We can pray. Also, as a development officer waits upon God’s favor, he or she ought to be involved in only a few activities, primarily, activities that develop genuine relationships. On average it will take ten to twelve meaningful “touches” from the initial introduction to the school to the point of receiving a first time gift. Great fundraising programs focus on making regular contact via email, over the phone, and in person—genuine touches that express care and concern for God’s calling on that donor’s life.

Finally, as we wait upon God’s

that sets it apart from every other educational institution in our neighborhood and within the ACCS. As the fundraiser cultivates relationships, his or her passion for those particulars will become evident. The potential donor will not be simply listening to a set of bullet point facts, but to the heart of the school conveyed through the fundraiser. The development officer must regularly enter the classroom to be reminded of the great things God is doing in the lives of the children.

A second characteristic to a great fundraiser and fundraising program is faith. The officer must believe that “the earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). A great fundraising program banks on the reality that God is the owner of all things and distributes its resources to whomever and whenever He chooses. To have this reality in the face of economic turmoil, the great fundraisers are cultivating their devotional life. Reflect on the prophet Isaiah. What did he need to see before he took the call of God into a difficult ministry? He needed a vision of God that humbled him and glorified God. When this occurred then Isaiah was able to say, “Here am I, send me” (Isa. 6:8). A

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vigorous devotional life energizes faith in the greatness of God.

The third characteristic of a great fundraising program is focus. The fundraiser must focus on Jesus Christ as the greatest treasure. In other words, our first concern must be the salvation of others. Once a donor knows Christ as their greatest treasure, they understand their role as manager of the financial resources God has given them. When Jesus Christ is one's infinite treasure, earthly treasures are no longer something to be hoarded. Yet, it is a dangerous work fundraisers have in working with potential donors. We are in danger of treating individuals merely as objects for our school's financial needs. Paul was careful. After commending the Philippians for their financial support he does not want to be accused that he is hinting for more. "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit" (Phil. 4:17). The fruit is the blessing that comes by the donor fulfilling God's call on their life.

Lauren Libby, current CEO and president of Trans World Radio, calls this the spiritual dynamics of calling. "The fundamental premise is that those who are called to ask will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in finding givers who are called to support their particular ministry purpose."¹ Our schools are called by God to educate children in a love of God and others through classical Christian education. Our fundraisers are called by God to enter into the lives of others whom God has called to support our schools. Great fundraisers recognize that this is a spiritual exercise whereby we are helping those responsible for God's resources to give where God calls them. Fundraising programs must keep focus on Jesus

Christ as the greatest treasure.

Fourthly, great development programs and development officers demonstrate fitness in their treasure, talents, and time. The blessing of the Great Recession is that it has caused our schools to be fit with our limited resources. Donors are more prayerful and intentional in their giving. They are identifying the ministries which are at the core of God's calling on their lives. Fundraisers must demonstrate fitness to donors. The general fundraising world recognizes this. "Donors don't wish to be associated with a sinking ship. Rather, they want to support well-managed organizations which efficiently accomplish shared visions."² A development officer will be honest with their donors about the financial condition of their school, share thoughtful plans how the school is responding, and generally keep donors informed on a regular basis. Besides quarterly updates, schools ought to provide an annual report of giving in association with the annual financial report.

Fitness also applies to development officers in terms of their talents. Great fundraisers are lifelong learners striving for excellence. Jerold Panas writes, "It means functioning as you are supposed to function. Not necessarily being the best in the field, but being the very best you can be."³ Because many of us came into our development positions indirectly we must refine our talents by reading, attending quality seminars, and having regular interactions with other fundraisers. This also means being fit in the use of time. There is no silver bullet to fundraising. Great fundraising works at gaining the attention of prospective donors,

growing their interest in the school, revealing how the donor's call matches the school's vision, and finally, asking. Success is found where development officers are accountable for these simple but profound steps.

Finally, the last characteristic of a great fundraiser is faithfulness—faithfulness to thank God and those whom He has moved to give. At Veritas it is our aim to thank every donor over the phone whether it is \$5 or \$5,000 within 48 hours of receiving the gift. We follow up each call with a personal, written thank you message. In four weeks we send out a tax deduction letter again thanking them for their gift. If their gift is over a certain threshold, our headmaster sends a personal note and a small gift is delivered. Faithfulness to thank also refers to the giver of all good gifts. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God" (2 Cor. 9:11, 12). Consider the prayers offered to God when someone gives to a school. The student gives thanks for his education. The parent who receives a scholarship gives thanks. The teacher gives thanks for a paycheck. The donor gives thanks for the opportunity. The grandparent gives thanks for his Christ-like grandchild. The board gives thanks for a good financial report. The bookkeeper gives thanks for a bill paid. The headmaster gives thanks for a small portion of the vision realized. The development

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The Sower . . .

who decided to build bigger barns. Two-kingdom bondage led to his demise. One-kingdom living prevents us from having an accumulation mindset and, ultimately, frees us to live fully human as we subject everything to God's will. He owns it all and we are free to use everything for His glory.

Using the analogy of the *Farmers' Almanac*, Gary describes the four seasons of work for the sower:

Winter: This is our time for preparation, to understand the role of the sower, how to fill our seed bags, and how to prepare the soil.

Spring: Time to sow biblical principles. We must know the hindrances to growth for the steward.

Summer: The time to see the spiritual growth of stewards. We are taught how to enlist others in helping during this highly productive time to encourage Christian generosity.

Fall: This is where we see the harvest. In this phase we are

taught how to maximize the harvest, to celebrate God's provision, and to accept when the crops are not as plentiful as we would have expected.

One of the most valuable aspects of these chapters is the side-by-side comparison of secular fundraising versus biblical steward-raising. Here is one example from Winter:

Secular Fundraising	Biblical-Steward Raising
1. Leaders consider their role as being the fundraisers for the organization.	1. Leaders understand that their role is to sow biblical stewardship principles; God is the Fundraiser.
2. Leaders strategize to get people to make gifts to their organizations.	2. Leaders gather biblical truths that encourage people to become givers who are rich toward God.
3. Leaders do whatever works to get people to respond generously.	3. Leaders model generosity and pray for God to help people grow spiritually in the grace of giving.

The seed is God's Word spread liberally and wisely. We are to cast the seeds everywhere. There are many factors that affect how the seeds come up, just like the seeds the farmer scatters in Mark. This parable concludes with the amazing multiplier of thirty-fold or more. When we scatter seeds in the way Scriptures teach we should not be surprised to experience returns that defy human understanding; they do.

Read this book to equip yourself to see the wonderful role God has for you as His "sowing agent" in a field that is ripe for the harvest. God is calling you to be thoroughly Christian in every dimension of resource raising.

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officer gives thanks for one more gift closer to the annual goal. On and on, an overflow of thanksgiving is given to God.

So perhaps we ought to encourage Johnny in his dream to be a fundraiser. If he is a great one he will be a person of favor, faith, focus, fitness, and faithfulness.

NOTES

1. Lauren Libby, "Maximizing Generosity by Aligning God's Calling," in *Revolution in Generosity*, ed. Wesley K. Willmer (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 198.

2. William T. Sturtevant, *The Artful Journey* (Chicago: Bonus Books, Inc., 1997), 11.

3. Jerold Panas, *Born to Raise* (Chicago: Pluribus Press, Inc., 1988), 1988, 47.