

Have Funding Success Feel Like Magic

By Laurie Herrick

What would it take to have funding “magically” appear for your organization? Check out this story that a development friend shared with me.

She worked for a large museum that had just embarked upon a \$75 million capital campaign. As part of the training, the development department presented the organizational “story” of why it was so critical to fund the museum campaign to more than 500 staff throughout the organization including guards, porters, program and the front line ticketing staff. It really paid off, as you’ll see...

Toward the end of the campaign they were baffled as to why one of their prospects, a famous philanthropist in their community, remained unresponsive to requests for a meeting. One day, the mother and granddaughter of this gentleman came to visit the museum. A savvy ticketer at the membership desk noted their name and alerted a porter, who ran up to development to announce that the philanthropist’s family was in house.

That child got the tour of her life! Programs worked with exhibits to release the best of the on-floor explainers to engage the two. They received behind-the-scenes tours of the theater as well as the planetarium. They visited the curators restoring an old clock. They saw pieces from exhibits that had not yet been released to the public ... You get the picture.

The very next day, my friend was sitting with the president at their usual morning meeting. They got a call from the philanthropist’s executive assistant, who asked, "On your board, what is the largest category for giving?" "A million and up," they replied.

By the next week, they received a check from this family in the amount of \$2 million.

So what was the magic that invited this \$2 million to fall from the sky? In fact, there was no “magic.” There was intention, planning, training and multiple conversations. How does this story apply to your organization? Notice that this scenario would not have happened if ALL of these team players had not received careful training:

- The development team initiated training staff in the museum’s essential story.
- The front desk (the ticketer) possessed the wherewithal to identify who was coming in the door.
- The porter readily shared with development the arrival of the philanthropist’s family.
- The curator invited the family into the day’s activities.

Lastly, did you notice the question that the philanthropist's office asked? They wanted to know the largest category of giving for the board. If their board's highest level of giving was \$1000, then perhaps the philanthropist would have given \$2000 instead of \$2 million! The museum's board was actively seeking stretch gifts.

Here are five things your team could be doing to create a culture of philanthropy, things that will build fundraising momentum and make your success feel like magic:

1. Educate all staff about their personalized roles in creating a culture of philanthropy. If your team includes development staff, have them teach their colleagues about the organization's mission and vision, about how each player can make a difference in it. Include those answering the phones, doing the bookkeeping, writing the thank you notes, developing programming. Share this story. Ask staff what roles they could imagine themselves playing if they met a philanthropist. Help them understand that *anyone* in contact with your organization could be a potential philanthropist.
2. Encourage your development staff (or development volunteers) to step up to leadership roles in your organization, which will demonstrate to what degree your organization values philanthropy. Development represents the donors. If you want more donors, development staff must be well informed and involved in your mission and vision. An organization that is successful in creating a culture of philanthropy integrates the donors and the development staff into their daily work.
3. Invite prospective donors to visit your organization with your development staff leading tours. Coach the different staff whom they meet into expressing passion about the organization's essential story.
4. Teach your board about philanthropy and the importance of their giving in the eyes of current and potential major donors. Encourage them to make stretch gifts. Support them as well in proficiently, passionately telling your organization's story.
5. Include development in staff and board meetings. Make that a high priority throughout your organization. This way, development knows about the successes to share with your funders, and other departments know about development's work and its value to the health and well-being of your mission.

Successful fundraising comes from educating every volunteer and professional member of your organization as to her or his unique role in supporting your development team. And now you know, even if it feels like magic, that it was the integration of the development team through the fabric of the museum that led to this donation, and that the same integration can lend your organization many similar success stories.