

When in Doubt, It's Back to Basics

Association Foundation Group
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James P. Gelatt, PhD

This is not the time to fundraise if . . .

- You are fundraising because it's your job
- You are a pessimist
- Your fundraising is driven by a board that *believes* it is a bad time
- You would rather ride it out than take the lead
- You are relying on the tried and no-longer-true means to fundraise

It is not just about your Board. It is about you.

- If you are the Executive Director of your Foundation, this is not the time to play the "it's the board's role."
- If you are the Foundation fundraiser, this is not the time to play the "if only" game.
- It's not about benchmarking: If you are not in it to win, you are in the wrong game.

OK, Mister Know-It-All Gelatt, What is it about?

- It starts by reaffirming why you do what you do:
 - Are you passionate about your Foundation – its potential, its value, its future.
 - Do you want to be a fundraiser? If not, it may be time to move on.
 - Do you want to be a leader – because when it comes down to it, that’s what the best fundraisers do.

Back to Basics – in a new way

- Be creative
 - “The aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous.”
 - Who wants, needs your Foundation?
 - Personalize the approach.
 - Use stories, pictures, anecdotes.
 - Help companies to do well while doing good.
- Be the positive force: the Obi-Wan Kenobi.
- Rethink your Foundation fundraising:
 - Who do you ask?
 - How do you ask?
 - Why do you ask?

Back to Basics – in a new way

- Revisit your “Case for Support”:
 - Focus on the difference you make.
 - Build in a sense of urgency.
- Thank your donors. Thank your donors. Thank your donors.
- **Re-cultivate** current donors.
- **Explore opportunities** for new ones.
- Take some chances:
 - Consider naming opportunities.

Back to Basics – in a new way

Practice resiliency:

- **1. Positive:** See life as complex but filled with opportunity.
- **2. Focused:** Have a clear vision of what you want to achieve.
- **3. Flexible:** Demonstrate pliability when responding to uncertainty.
- **4. Organized:** Develop structured approaches to managing ambiguity.
- **5. Proactive:** Engage with change rather than defending against it.

Back to Basics – in a new way

- Inspire evangelists.
- Master the art of adaptation.



Back to Basics – in a new way

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Keep in touch

James P. Gelatt, PhD
Professor and Program Director
Graduate School
University of Maryland University College

jgelatt@umuc.edu; jgelatt@aol.com
301.785.9538 (cell); 434.471.4138 (Skype)

Especially Now - It's Not About Fundraising

Everyone, donors included, is worried about their finances. Logic would say that it's the time to retrench, lower expectations, trim programs, tighten the belt. But is it?

By James Gelatt

The portfolios of grantmaking foundations are down significantly. Endowments in most major universities have taken a beating. Nonprofits are feeling anxious about their potential to meet basic goals, much less increase revenue. Everyone, donors included, is worried.

Logic would say that it's the time to retrench, lower expectations, trim programs, tighten the belt. I would like to suggest a different and rather difficult philosophy. I would like to suggest that this is the time to focus not on the developing tactics to survive today but rather to develop strategies to succeed in the future.

I had my first real "ah hah" about fundraising when the organization that had recently hired me decided to launch a major campaign. Through accidents of fate, although I was new kid on the block, I was given the responsibility to oversee the campaign.

I talked with board members, senior staff, friends. I read everything I could find on campaign fundraising. And I concluded that there was no way that we could mount a successful campaign. With great trepidation, I went to the organization's CEO, telling him that I thought we needed to delay the campaign.

The CEO gave me some advice that is as relevant today as it was then:

"You know, there will always be people who will tell you that this is not a good time to fundraise. The economy is tanking. People are holding on to what money they have. There's way too much competition for the limited money that people are willing to contribute.

"There will always be people who will tell you this is not a good time to fundraise. And for those people – it never is."

A clarification is in order: What my CEO – my mentor – was saying wasn't that it was a good time to fundraise. What he was saying was that for those who believed it, it was a good time to raise money. There's a difference. Fundraising is a job. Being successful at raising money is a way of philosophical mindset

Let me say it another way:

This is not the time for people who are doing fundraising because it's the job for which they got hired.

If you are not passionate about the cause for which you are working, maybe you should find another job. To be really successful in raising funds – especially in these tough times – you have to believe that the cause is incredibly worthwhile. You also have to see fundraising as an honorable profession. You are not just raising money. You are making your world a better place.

This is not the time for people who are pessimistic.

If you have doubts about the importance of the place where you work; if you doubt about whether you can make a real difference in the success of the organization; if you are saying things like, "Well, I can't do anything because [so and so] won't let me – maybe it's time to move on.

I'm a futurist. Futurists track trends, and a lot of trends we track are not very positive. But futurists believe this – the future is not fixed. We can create the kind of future that we want.

This is not the time for people who think that it's still same old same old when it comes to fundraising strategy.

I would suggest to you that for many nonprofits, direct mail is dead on arrival. So, too, for telephone solicitation. Getting a call from someone hired to call you on behalf of a nonprofit has always been annoying. It may even become counterproductive.

Most people from whom you want to raise money actually have the ability to recognize that the caller is a hired hand, paid either by the hour or by the successful call. If you really want to do telephone solicitation, follow the college model. Involve volunteers who are part of the organization and truly believe in it.

Go back to fundamentals: Whom do you know? Who does your board know? Who might see a reason to become involved with your nonprofit?

Take a close look at your “same old” routine. Does it make sense to continue with special events? Do they continue to provide a favorable return on investment? Could you and your volunteers use their time more profitably?

If you are the executive director, this is not the time to play the “it’s the board’s decision (board’s responsibility)” card.

You were hired to be the executive director. Not director. Not chief board contact. Executive director. The term implies decision-making, leadership, taking risks. What the nonprofit does not need now – especially now – is the executive director who plays it safe. It’s not about keeping your job. It’s about leading the organization that you were hired to run.

This is not the time for boards that are used to sitting in their board chairs and letting staff do the fundraising.

It has always been your job to raise money for the organization. It’s called fiduciary responsibility. What distinguishes nonprofits from for-profits is that nonprofits rely on other people to donate. And it’s your job to see that happens – by giving personally, by using your own contact network, by helping to develop strategy, by telling anybody who will listen about the cause to which you are committed. It’s not enough to develop strategy. It’s your job to implement the strategy, in cooperation with staff.

I have had the privilege to work as a consultant with an organization called Special Love. It serves kids with cancer and their families. It is the most upbeat, positive nonprofit that I’ve known in over 30 years of work in the nonprofit field. Most of the board members are parents. Their kids either have cancer, had cancer, or died from cancer. And yet their passion is contagious. They are great fundraisers not because they have to be, but because it’s integral to what they value as people.

OK – if it’s not about fundraising, what is it about?

It’s about remembering why we chose to work for a nonprofit. It wasn’t the money. It was the chance to make a difference.

It’s about being creative.

If you think you have to beat your nonprofit competition, you are missing the point. Benchmarking yourself against the competition sets the bar too low.

And while we’re at it: Why should it be competitive? If you are in the arts, have you considered that you might be more successful by encouraging your donors to invest in the arts with their funds? Have you considered what’s sometimes called cooptition – working with potential competitors? Maybe even sharing resources? Space? Staff?

It's about passion. It was extraordinary to watch the closing of the event at the Lincoln Memorial one day before the Inauguration. What was it that brought together people as disparate as Bono and Pete Seger, or that had people of any age and background sing God Bless America? In no way am I suggesting that we can any one of us pull off such an event, but it's worth thinking about what made so many people, of such diverse ages and colors and backgrounds, come together for this event.

Nonprofits have always been there when there wasn't public money to get things done. They didn't rely on the government support. They just got it done.

I encourage you to rise to that challenge.

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Gelatt is the author of [Managing Nonprofits in the 21st Century](#) and general editor of Aspen's [Fund Raising Series for the 21st Century](#). He is the president of Prentice Associates, a management consulting company specializing in associations and other national nonprofits, and a past-president of the Greater Washington, D.C. chapter of the National Society of Association Executives. You can reach him by email at jgelatt@umuc.edu

The Seven Habits Of Highly Successful Foundations

#1 The Foundation has a clear mission and focus.

- The mission is clearly defined. 1 2 3 4 5
- The mission is shared by Foundation board and staff. 1 2 3 4 5
- The mission is compatible with the Association's mission. 1 2 3 4 5
- The mission "resonates" with Association members. 1 2 3 4 5
- The mission is reflected in the Foundation's strategic plan. 1 2 3 4 5
- The mission is reflected in the Association's strategic plan. 1 2 3 4 5
- The mission demonstrates a willingness to "stretch." 1 2 3 4 5

Average score _____

#2 Volunteer leadership are active and committed.

- The Foundation Board supports the Foundation mission. 1 2 3 4 5
- The Foundation Board proactively supports the goals and objectives of the Foundation. 1 2 3 4 5
- Other Foundation volunteers are similarly invested. 1 2 3 4 5
- Foundation volunteers commit time and talent. 1 2 3 4 5
- Association leaders demonstrate their support of the Foundation's goals and objectives. 1 2 3 4 5
- Foundation leaders personally contribute financially. 1 2 3 4 5
- Association leaders personally contribute financially. 1 2 3 4 5
- The Foundation Board is respected by its constituents. 1 2 3 4 5

Average score _____

#3 Foundation staff are competent and valued.

- Foundation staff are competent. 1 2 3 4 5
- Foundation staff are committed to the Foundation. 1 2 3 4 5
- Foundation staffing is sufficient. 1 2 3 4 5
- Foundation staff work well with Foundation volunteers. 1 2 3 4 5
- Foundation staff work well with Association volunteers. 1 2 3 4 5
- Foundation staff are respected and valued internally and externally. 1 2 3 4 5

Average score _____

#4 The Foundation is visible within its "community."

- The Foundation has high visibility within the Association. 1 2 3 4 5
- The Foundation has a reputation for success. 1 2 3 4 5
- The Foundation has a strong public relations program. 1 2 3 4 5
- Foundation volunteers and staff are effective emissaries. 1 2 3 4 5
- Association volunteers and staff are effective emissaries. 1 2 3 4 5

Average score _____

#5 The Foundation enjoys financial stability.

- The Foundation has a solid donor base. 1 2 3 4 5
 - There is a reservoir of funding prospects. 1 2 3 4 5
 - The Association demonstrates its support of the Foundation mission and accomplishments through its financial support. 1 2 3 4 5
 - The Foundation is able to raise funds successfully. 1 2 3 4 5
 - The Foundation's fund raising is cost effective. 1 2 3 4 5
 - Volunteers provide meaningful funding contacts. 1 2 3 4 5
 - Volunteers are actively involved in achieving funding goals. 1 2 3 4 5
 - The Foundation's fund raising is viewed positively by the Association. 1 2 3 4 5
 - The Foundation is a good steward of its contributions. 1 2 3 4 5
- Average score _____

#6 The relationship between Association and Foundation is positive.

- There is an affirming relationship between Association and Foundation. 1 2 3 4 5
 - The Foundation enjoys a positive relationship among Association staff, leadership and other constituents. 1 2 3 4 5
 - The relationship between Foundation and Association is based on a shared vision. 1 2 3 4 5
 - To a degree, there is overlap between the two missions. 1 2 3 4 5
 - There is meaningful, ongoing communication between Association and Foundation. 1 2 3 4 5
 - Association leaders sitting on the Foundation Board are actively supportive of the Foundation mission. 1 2 3 4 5
- Average score _____

#7 The Foundation's contributions to the "community" are valued.

- The Foundation is seen as making a difference. 1 2 3 4 5
 - Donors and others see value in becoming involved. 1 2 3 4 5
 - There is a desire on the part of the Association membership to have the Foundation succeed. 1 2 3 4 5
- Average score _____

Total average score _____