

The Healthy Board Notebook

November 14, 2007

The healthy governing board embraces and regularly reviews a vital, clear mission and vision for the organization.

It's Not About the Money

In our November 12 conversation, we talked about how important it is for your board to take an active role in maintaining a fresh, vital organizational mission and vision. Today, I want to take that conversation a bit further and look particularly at the influence mission and vision have on fundraising.

In his first career, my business partner, Obediah Gibson, sold and managed the sale of packaging materials—cardboard boxes. One day his son was preparing for Show and Tell at school. When Todd asked Obediah, “What do you do?”, Obediah responded, “I sell boxes.”

Todd's next question was, “What's in the boxes?” Obediah's response, “Nothing.” After a moment of thought, Todd looked at his dad and said, “Nothing? Then you must be a mighty good salesman!”

At one level, Obediah's customers did not want boxes. They wanted the space inside the box and the protection that the box provided to ship their merchandise. They also wanted the quality customer service that set him apart from many of his competitors.

In the constant push to raise money—and then raise more money, all too often non-profit organizations do not give enough time and attention to the box—the elements of their programs that support increased fundraising success. Board development and strategic action provide the “space, protection, and service” that make expanded fundraising capacity possible.

The creation of a healthy, performance-based board of directors is one of the most powerful avenues to increased fundraising capacity and productivity. A healthy board understands that its first responsibility is to maintain a lively, focused sense of organizational mission that sets the stage for all of the activities and services that follow—including fundraising. A healthy board is committed to positioning the organization strategically in order to maximize both its impact and its competitive position.

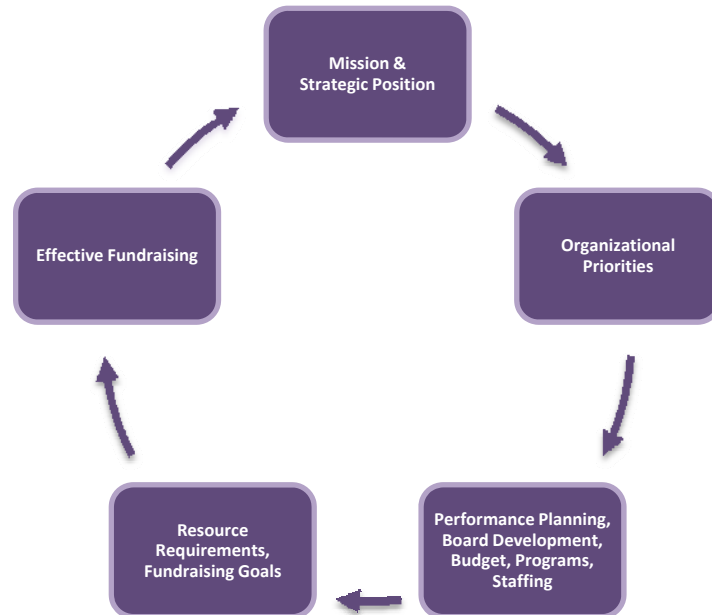
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The healthy board knows that fundraising is not about the money!

Your organization's mission and strategic position determine your priorities for program and budget development. They provide the framework within which planning and infrastructure are established. The healthy board understands and acts on the reality that volunteers and donors are drawn to your organization's mission and its ability to make individual lives better and improve the quality of life for those you serve. They are not excited by the fact that your organization needs money.

The healthy board also knows that fundraising is a lot about the money!

In today's fast-paced, competitive environment, your organization needs the resources that keep your programs at the top of their game. Those resources cost money—at times, a lot of money. The healthy board understands that it has the responsibility to obtain the financial resources needed to secure a vibrant, sustainable future for the organization.



Your organization's mission and strategic position are the starting points for cultivating a healthy organization. The cycle reinforces itself as effective fundraising leads to a stronger position and enhanced capacity for mission.

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In order to secure the resources your organization needs, the healthy board will work with you and your executive staff to develop the structure, competence, and confidence needed for success. In the process, the healthy board establishes fundraising performance expectations for the board, the fundraising committee, and individual board members. These expectations become part of the board's accountability structure.

Is your board ready?

As your board assumes increasing responsibility for resource development, several questions will help guide its growth:

- » Does your board focus on organizational mission and use that as the springboard for its activities?
- » Does the board create an effective working partnership with your executive staff to maximize fundraising success?
- » Does the board enlist members with the resources, skills, and connections to support sound board development and strategic positioning?
- » Does the board see that members are prepared effectively to participate in all phases of fundraising activity?
- » Do board members participate actively in the identification, cultivation, and stewardship of donors?
- » Do board members set the example for other donors through their own giving?
- » Does the development committee provide effective leadership in planning and implementing a vibrant fundraising program?

As the fundraising climate continues to grow more and more competitive, your board's response to these and related questions is paramount to the important work of your organization. Your board *is* your best avenue to increased fundraising.

It bears repeating, **fundraising is not about the money**—it is about **your organization's capacity to fulfill its mission**. Obediah Gibson did not sell boxes—he sold space, protection, and service. Healthy boards do not sell organizational need. They raise money as an outgrowth of intense, mission-focused organizational development!

I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

All the best!

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