



The Right Stuff

Search for Development Executive is Critical Task

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Many Alliance for Children and Families members are undergoing major transitions in their philanthropic culture and capacity. Some are adding development staff for the first time, some are moving to the next stage, and some are simply replacing a skilled development staff member who has left the agency. In this column I will provide perspective on the frustrations and traps in developing the development function within a human service agency—particularly the difficulty of recruiting a skilled development executive.

The recruitment of the first-ever or replacement development executive is one of the most important tasks faced by a CEO because the chief development officer is one of the key senior positions in the agency. Frustrations often arise that are tied to expectations that may not be realistic on a variety of levels. Problems arise in expectations about role and function, salary compared to other key positions, fantasies about a candidate's donor relationships, and even board expectations. More than the recruitment for any other position in senior management, this recruitment process is often daunting and frustrating. Why?

Let me address the issue of seeking a candidate who will bring established relationships with major donors to the agency. Certainly, most experienced development professionals have networks of relationships. However, if this is the primary criteria for selection of the

candidate, then the role and expectations of the board need to be carefully examined. The Association of Fundraising Professionals Code of Ethics prevents development officers from approaching donors or prospects from one organization for support of another organization unless the donor or prospect is already a donor or prospect of the new organization. It is the board's primary obligation to open doors to new relationships, to act as ambassadors in their worlds, and even to brag

management. She/he works with the board to encourage and motivate them, to provide skills, tools, and materials when needed, to encourage their efforts, to further their imagination, to assist in their cultivation of new relationships, and to coordinate the entire development process and plan.

Development directors do not create the relationships alone, nor do they raise the money. The culture and process of community relationship management by the board,

CEO, and staff—as a team—result in donations. Rarely will an agency find a development executive who is better connected than the board. Even if one does find such an individual, those relationships may well be connected to a prior position and are not necessarily transferable (not to mention the ethical considerations). Yet, it is not uncommon to hear articulated as one of the key requirements of a chief development position “established community relationships.”

If you accept that being “connected” is not the development executive's primary asset, but rather the board's, then what are the key assets for the development executive? I suggest that one primary asset is the ability to communicate in a compelling fashion both orally and in writing. Sustainable development is all about communication. Many of us, me included, feel the quality of an agency's development process and plan rests solidly on a foundation of communication. If the communication plan is not the bedrock upon which the development plan is anchored, then the agency runs a huge risk of missed

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about the good work of the agency in social situations. The development executive cannot, and will not, be able to substitute for an active, engaged, and connected board.

To put it more simply, it is the board's community. It is why they are on the board. It is their obligation, role, and responsibility to have community relationships. Sustainable fundraising grows out of sophisticated relationship management, a culture of donor-centered values that drive communication, engagement strategies, and activities. In contrast, the development professional facilitates and supports the process of relationship

opportunities and misalliances with donors. The sophistication and quality of the development executive's communication ability are without a doubt keys to success. Her/his ability to integrate a communications plan with the development plan is as imperative as her/his ability to assist the board and the CEO in telling the story, sharing the dream, and inviting participation.

The other assets needed to be a successful development executive include the discipline to meet challenges, a breadth of interest and accomplishments that allows for perspective and an understanding of various donors, a good understanding of human nature, the ability to innovate, and a sense of curiosity that leads to the willingness to challenge the status quo within the agency (philanthropy is fairly new to most of our cultures). In addition, I suggest you need an analytic predisposition, physical and emotional stamina, a lot of patience, managerial skill that is results-oriented, and whenever possible, varied life and cultural experiences that allow for a breadth of appreciation for the many audiences who might be interested in the story of the organization.

I hope you noticed that experience with fundraising programs, techniques, and details did NOT make the list of important assets. Remember, you are not hiring a technician, you are hiring an executive. Since most techniques of fund development can be learned very quickly, technicians are available to support fund development tasks or plans. Communication and managerial skills are essential for success and are not as easily or as quickly learned. When you examine the skill set needed for a good development executive you should notice that they are not that different from many of the skills demanded of a CEO. I do not mean to minimize the value of solid development experience. Of course it is important, but the position of development executive demands high levels of leadership and managerial acumen.

Consider for a moment Simone Joyaux's suggestions for the nature and scope of the position ("Strategic Fund Development: Building Relationships that Last[®]," 2001, page 9) "Participates with the chief executive officer, staff, and board in defining the organization's mission and direction. . . Helps establish performance measures for fund development, monitors results, and helps the CEO, development committee(s), and board evaluate the effectiveness of the organization's fund development program . . . Provides general over-

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sight of all of the organization's fund development activities, manages the day-to-day operations of the development function, and monitors adequacy of activities through coordination with board, staff, and volunteers. . . Ensures attainment of organization's fund development goals through the selection, development, motivation, and evaluation of human resources, both professional and volunteer. . . Works with the CEO, development committee(s) chair(s), and board president to enable the board to fulfill its fund development role and facilitate the optimum interaction between management and volunteers."

These are the responsibilities of a seasoned and solid executive. (I recommend Ms. Joyaux's book. It is an excellent resource and provides a good deal of depth on this topic.)

Another impediment to recruiting a quality development executive is often unrealistic salary expectations on the part of the agency—or worse, ambivalence. Like chief financial officers, the chief development officer will be a highly paid staff member within the organization. For some of our members, it is even possible that the CEO's salary is below the level needed to attract a first-rate development executive. Often in these situations, the agency

WORKSHOP OPPORTUNITIES

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When Alliance for Children and Families members took part in the Resource Development Services training in January 2005, one of the attendees said, "It was an exceptional day-and-a-half of training! The presenters provided a wealth of information, referral sources, and energetic dialogue."

If you were not able to attend that training seminar, there are two more opportunities this year on **April 20-21** at the Park Hotel in Charlotte, North Carolina and **May 18-19** at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Rosemont (Chicago), Illinois.

This day-and-a-half workshop for CEOs, development directors, and board members, is an excellent opportunity to learn hands-on and practical ways to implement and maintain a strong fund development effort. The training is possible through a generous grant from the William Randolph Hearst Foundation. For more information and to register, go to www.alliance1.org. Contact Mary Riordan at 800-221-3726, ext. 3678 with any other questions.

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Tom D'Attalo
Chief Financial Officer
Lutheran Social Services
of Illinois

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is beginning the process of establishing a development function.

In more modest-sized agencies it may well be that the CEO takes on the leadership role and responsibilities of chief development officer and is only able to hire staff for some of the technical aspects of implementing the agency's plan, or is even totally dependent on volunteer support. But, if this is the case, it is very important to understand the reality of the situation and the role that the CEO is in. Even a good technician such as an event coordinator is not the same as a development executive; in fact, they may have entirely different skill sets. Putting the wrong person in as the development "executive" can lead to a great deal of misalignment as well as huge unmet expectations and frustration.

Currently, development is one of the hottest markets in the nonprofit world. This fact can lead to much tension within an organization. Many of the key administrative executive functions require compensation at a level that is often substantially higher than service delivery executive staff. Like it or not, this is a reality of the marketplace. However, this frequently raises many concerns and issues for the organization and its culture.

Investments in development have historically been seen as general and administrative overhead and not core to mission. It is precisely due to this mistaken notion that the child- and family-serving sector is so far behind our development colleagues in education, health care, the arts, and the environment.

In conclusion, if you accept that being "connected" is the board's responsibility, then the core contribution of a skilled development executive is to partner with the CEO to communicate the agency's vision in a compelling fashion so as to engage and inspire your staff, your board, and the community to support your mission and to celebrate your accomplishments. At the end of the day we may measure success in dollars raised, but actually the work is all about sharing the dream, inspiring participation in it, creating partnerships, and building sustainable relationships—all in the service of the agency's strategic vision and mission. ▲



Bob Jones is president and CEO of Children's Aid and Family Services, Inc., in Paramus, NJ. To find out more about Children's Aid and Family Services, visit their Web site at www.cafsnj.org.