

The True Meaning of Fundraising

By

Lilya Wagner, Ed.D., CFRE

Director, Philanthropic Service for Institutions (PSI)

Fundraising is increasingly taking on a high-level significance as a career. Many young people and others are seeking out academic programs or making other efforts to educate themselves for professional fundraising. One reason why this is occurring is because fundraising is an essential function in the entire scope of the nonprofit sector which is supported by philanthropy. And philanthropy is a highly significant part of the successful functioning of any nonprofit organization. It provides opportunities for fulfillment, meets needs, addresses crises and disasters, and builds sustainability for the future. A fundraiser, therefore, is a professional who is the manager of a process that brings together peoples' sense of caring with needs that must be met.

Fundraising is a critical element in the preservation of values. These values, inherent in our civic spirit, are fostered by philanthropic action—giving and volunteering.

Fundraising is not a technical exercise. It takes place within the larger framework of an organization and its mission, and, therefore, is crucial for civil society and the development or perpetuation of Adventist values of caring for others. Fundraising, therefore, is for the thoughtful professional, and not a mere fulfillment of a “to do” list.

It is the organizations of the nonprofit sector that touch the lives of ordinary and extraordinary citizens alike in ways that the other sectors aren't obligated to affect or simply cannot. While successful nonprofit organizations need to be profitable in order to survive, this is not their primary purpose. They provide for the interests and needs of all—educational, social, artistic, cultural, physical, environmental, and professional. Hospitals, schools and universities, museums, human service agencies, and others provide services and benefits for all citizens. It is a “sector of opportunity.” It is a sector of organizations entrusted by donors and constituents to meet public needs and address causes.

Most people undertake fundraising because it is a practice and activity that serves human needs—needs not served by the other sectors, business and government. People want to heal, to educate, to preserve cultures, to shelter the abused, or to inspire. Belief in the causes that a fundraiser serves is of primary importance. Fundraising should touch souls, the professional's as well as those who are served.

A unique factor of fundraising is that at the end of each day, the fundraiser has engaged in a journey worth sharing because, whether or not the results of that day's efforts are visible now or long-term, the professional can take pride in the nature of the work. Fundraising, or development or advancement, as some prefer to call it, is a fundamental part of the process that makes institutions and causes successful. The genuinely committed professional feels a “calling” to the work of fundraising. The satisfaction is derived from results, often intangible as well as those that aren't visible for some time in the future, not from recognition.

In short, perhaps Pablo Casals, the renowned cellist, said it best: “The capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest meaning and significance.”¹ This sums up the reasons why fundraising is, and can be, an exciting and fulfilling activity—it is focused on caring, and doing so with excellence.

¹As quoted in *Accent on Philanthropy II*, May, 1983, p. 16.