SELECTING AND KEEPING GOOD VOLUNTEER LEADERS

It sounds funny to talk about selecting and keeping good volunteer leaders, but as anyone who's been associated with a less-than-stellar fundraising campaign can attest, your campaign is only as successful as its leaders.

Look at the volunteer selection process as if you were starting a small company, hiring the necessary "supervisors" and "employees" who have their own responsibilities and tasks to help make the "company" run smoothly. Matching skills to responsibilities becomes critical to the overall success of the organization.

Some companies experience problems when a person who is better suited to work in the accounting department is placed in the human resources or research and development department. Your campaign's fundraising success depends on—to a great extent—matching the right volunteer leader to the right "job."

More importantly, though, you have to have the right CEO or company president on board before any hiring can begin. You don't want someone experienced only in technology, for example, to run a bank. The process is the same when selecting people to lead your fundraising campaign. You need to find the right fit.

Recruit passion. Nurture involvement.

Ensuring the right fit is much more than finding a warm body to fill a chair. Superior volunteer leaders must have a passion for what they're doing and a keen belief of the campaign's purpose, goal, organization and scope. Volunteer leaders who have a passion for what they're doing will unleash their passion to motivate their volunteers on to success.

"Leadership in itself, let it never be forgotten, is always the key factor in successful fundraising, whatever the cause, whatever the goal and whatever the scope of the campaign." [1]

Recruiting volunteer leaders is best done from the top down. For example, the board of directors selects the steering committee members. The steering committee selects the campaign chair and the campaign chair selects the leadership gift chair, public relations chair and major gifts chair. The chairs, in turn, select their volunteers.

Although the majority of leaders may already be involved with your organization or campaign, consider looking outside your "family" to those well-known and well-respected community volunteer leaders. Also look to those who are newly rich, newly powerful and top managers of key corporations. Those who have passion for the power of philanthropy and volunteerism can be nurtured into directing that passion on behalf of your campaign.

A top volunteer leader must be:

- Totally committed to the campaign
- A successful veteran of other campaigns
- Willing to make a major campaign gift
- A dynamic and passionate "asker"
- Owed more favors than he or she owes because of support for other community projects

- Well-known, admired and respected in the community
- Able to motivate potential major donors
- Able to surround himself or herself with a team of experienced and loyal volunteers
- Available during the campaign; absentee management is ineffective in fundraising

Find out as much as you can about your volunteers, including organizations they belong to, interests and hobbies, their immediate family's interests and social affiliations and their all-important link to your organization. Gathering information about your volunteer leaders can save you time and perhaps embarrassment in the long run.

In addition to tailoring your volunteers' talents to your fundraising goals and objectives, finding out what excites your volunteers also helps you create a relationship with them.

Once you've selected your volunteer leaders, plan enough time to talk to them about the campaign and its objectives. Discuss what their responsibilities will be and what you expect of them. Let them ask questions and be honest about the time commitment involved in the fundraising process. Nurture their involvement. Your investment of time with them throughout the campaign will ensure your volunteer leaders' commitment of their time to your campaign.

Motivate your volunteer leaders.

"Top leadership should be excited and exciting." [2] If your top leaders aren't excited about your campaign, you can't expect them to get anyone else to be either.
Here are a few tips to motivate volunteer leaders, increase their productivity and reduce turnover:

- Be organized, show appreciation and provide a positive experience.
- Make their experience meaningful and don't take their commitment for granted.
- Remember they are volunteering their most valuable possession—time.
- Provide them with as much training as they need or request.

Fundraising is all about relationships—people give to people, not just to causes. Before they give to your campaign, they have to know you and trust you. That holds true for recruiting excellent leaders. Volunteers need to know you and your cause. Trust leads to commitment and committed leaders are the key to success. The more time you spend recruiting leaders and nurturing leadership, the more successful your campaign will be.

1 H.J. Seymour, "Designs for Fund Raising," New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

2 Kent E. Dove, "Conducting a Successful Capital Campaign," San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988.