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Elizabeth Loudon serves up some essential tips and tricks to get everyone in your organisation onboard

Fundraising can feel like navigating rough seas at times. The wind and waves are constantly hurling at you, and there's an ever-changing weather forecast. Some of the crew might be sitting close enough to read this article over your shoulder, but they are no use if they don't help you as much as you help them.

How can you create a fundraising team culture that enables all staff and volunteers to play their part, through the rough times as well as the smooth? Here are some top tips to create a dedicated team spirit and keep your fundraising ship on course.

Show and tell

When you show data to management or trustees, always tell a story about what the figures mean. For example: you might show that the number of regular donors went down last year – but the average gift went up. The story might be that your loyal donors stick by you through thick and thin, and need to be rewarded for doing so. The more consistently you show and tell, the more you will be respected as an expert who can interpret the scary truth about why people do and don't give to your cause.

Food for thought

When you're preparing to approach a top-drawer prospect (a major foundation, for example), hold an open staff lunch and ask everybody to contribute ideas about how to make the best possible case. Let people know if you use their ideas, even if it's only a change in wording. They'll feel they're part of your team and share more responsibility for the outcome, good or bad.

Keep people posted

Launch a newsletter, online bulletin or Facebook group in which you share

good news about donors, gifts, events, and what you've been up to. (If you don't tell them, they'll assume the worst – that all you do is have fun!) Walk the floor with a notebook, gather people's stories, and include one in each bulletin, along with an explanation of how you've been able to use their stories in talking about the charity's work with donors.

Adopt an 'angel'

Have any donors become special friends who will go the extra mile for you? Invite two or three of them to be 'angel advocates' who will meet with the team. Brief your angels in advance, asking them to explain why they support your charity, what sort of reports they enjoy, and what suggestions they have for new or better ways of sharing the charity's story. Announce the meeting formally, explain that Chatham House confidentiality rules will apply, lay on food and drink and they'll take it seriously.

Travel in packs

Donors feel more connected to a charity, and want to give more, once they've got to know the programme staff on the front lines. A good way to demonstrate that your job is to facilitate these connections is to take a colleague or volunteer along to meet your most generous donors personally. Invite the kinds of people you think the donor would actually enjoy talking to – even if they're relatively junior.

Make everyone a fundraiser

In smaller charities, you can invite the whole team to a brief training session, explaining that everybody needs to know how to ask for a gift, report on a grant, or manage demanding donors, 'just in case'. Make it fun: give people the chance to ask each other for money and then practice

tackling tough questions about the charity. Mix and match staff and volunteers at all levels from the board room to the back room. If your charity is larger, recommend training for programme staff or the senior management team.

Ask about failure

Programme and administrative staff sometimes see donors as walking cash machines, rather than as trusted partners. It's a little counter-intuitive, but one way to change this kind of thinking is to ask for examples of challenges or failure, as well as success, to share with your donors. Your colleagues may be intrigued to learn that donors really care about how their work is going and can handle the truth.

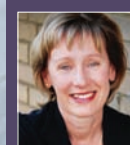
Watch their language

Gently correct pejorative terms such as 'stalking', 'stinking rich' and so on. Offer positive alternatives that encourage respect, such as 'building relationships', 'generous supporters' and 'great volunteers'. And never use negative terminology yourself.

Reward engagement

Once a month, make a big fuss of the volunteer or staff member who has done most to help you with fundraising, for example by awarding a prize or writing a personal thank you.

Follow these tips, and people will want to help and come to you with terrific leads and inspirational ideas. Never mind if you didn't get the scoop yourself, you've got all hands on deck!



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