FriendRaising

Community Engagement Strategies for Boards Who Hate Fundraising but Love Making Friends

Second Edition

by
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Introduction

You've Got to Have Friends

As I am writing this book, songs come to mind. While love songs abound in our culture, many of the songs that stick around year after year are about friendship. Bette Midler belting out "You've Got to Have Friends." James Taylor doing Carole King's "You've Got a Friend." Andrew Gold's "Thank You for Being a Friend," that eventually became the theme song to the Golden Girls. Twenty or thirty years after the latest ode to love has come and gone, songs about friendship endure.

Look at television, the cultural touchstone of our age. Which shows last forever? The ones where the friendships are strong. In the U.S., "Friends" obviously comes to mind. So does "Will and Grace." During its run as one of the hottest shows ever, women admitted that more than coveting the shoes worn on "Sex and the City", they coveted the enduring and abiding "I'll always be here for you" friendship of those 4 women. Years after they have gone off the air, we smile to think of shows like "Cheers" and "M.A.S.H." and "Taxi". Around the world, the television shows that invite viewers to feel part of a group of friends rank high on the lists of favorites, year after year.

In my own life, my friends have been everything. What I have with my dear old friends makes life ok all the time. Making new friends is more fun than any activity I can think of. Learning about new people, seeing where and how we fit together, becoming part of their family as they become part of mine.

Friendship is supportive. It is inspiring. It is joyful.

Fundraising

A few years back, I approached a friend - one of the best fundraisers I know - and I asked her to teach me to ask for money for the Community Diaper Bank, the organization my business partner and I had founded. She looked at me as if I had grown another nose. "What are you talking about? You've raised hundreds of thousands of dollars. Everyone in town supports the Diaper Bank. Is this a joke?"

And I hung my head in confession. "Asking for money scares the life out of me."

The truth is I am not alone. Even in the best-selling guides to asking for money, the authors talk about how scary that effort can be. Yes, there are some people who feel comfortable asking for money, and there are others who learn to do it and eventually grow more comfortable with it.

But there are just as many Board Members, if not more, who would rather have a root canal than ask for money. For those people, being forced to ask for money brings on a unique form of stage fright.

Because nonprofits are under the impression that one of the primary roles of the board is to raise funds (it is not - the board's most critical role, first and foremost, is to lead, to govern), consultants continue to tell Board Members they will need to just get over it.

If we pictured instead telling all our Board Members that they needed to go on stage and speak before 500 people, consultants would never dream of telling their clients, "Just get over it; it's part of your job." But it is that same stage fright that disables many Board Members when they consider asking for funds. In addition, when it comes to asking for money from their friends, many of our friends are involved with their own causes. If we ask them for money, they will just ask us for money.

And in truth, how good is any of this for the long term health of our organizations? When we ask our personal friends for money, we know most will not become true friends of the organization, but will merely remain personal friends of a Board Member. When that Board Member is no longer around, will that friend still be a donor?

Equally important, the requirement that boards fundraise alienates many Board Members, making them feel inadequate, and keeping some good potential Board Members from joining boards in the first place.

So where does that leave us? It leaves us with a huge percentage of Board Members who hate to raise money, feeling pressured to do so or flat out not doing it. It leaves us with frustrated fundraising consultants and Executive Directors. It leaves us with prospective Board Members who do not join boards at all because they do not want to do fundraising. (We actually call one of our FriendRaising classes, "But I Don't Know Any Rich People!")

And when Board Members do raise money from their friends, often those friends stop giving when those Board Members stop asking - when they leave the board.

Perhaps instead of trying to get our boards to fundraise, it's time to start asking a different question altogether.

We've Got It All Wrong

Ask anyone which is more enduring, friendship or money, and you will find a direct correlation between how content or fulfilled that person is and his response. If money is more important to that person, he may have a nice car and a nice home, but he may also confess to feeling empty. On the other hand, if friendship is more important, while that person may struggle here or there and worry sometimes, he will likely look back at having lived a happy, fulfilled life. Those for whom friends are more important than money are often the ones whose families talk about them as always wearing a smile, even in the face of adversity.

A person who is rich in friends is indeed rich. A true friend will be there to dance when times are good, and will be there with both shoulders (for crying) and both arms outstretched (for helping) when times are bad. A true friend relishes sitting up late into the night, catching up when it has been way too long between visits. A true friend will help you move when you are finally heading into that dream home (in good times) or when your marriage crumbles (in bad times).

These are the relationships that make life worth living, the relationships that support us in every way.

So where is that component in our nonprofit organizations?

In my experience, nonprofits use the word "friends" in 2 ways:

1) We are advised that "fundraising is about relationship building." If we want money, then we had best be good about building strong relationships with our donors.

    This is the transactional view of friendship. "If you give us money, we will be your friend. If we think you will give us money, we will court you as our friend. If you fail to give us money, we will eventually stop calling you. The more money you give us, the more friendly we will be."

2) The term "friend-raiser" has become almost a code-word for rationalizing a failed fundraising event. We have all heard it - the excuse for why we spend 6 months of staff and board and volunteer time on an event that provides a paltry profit once we have netted out the salaries of the staff and the goodwill and time of the board and volunteers. "Well the event isn't just a fundraiser. It's a friend-raiser," could be the rallying cry of failed fundraising events everywhere.

This is the rationalizing view of friendship. "If we don't make our primary goal - money - we can always just say we were looking for friends."

Programs the Community Would Not Let Die

A while back I was talking about the Diaper Bank we founded with the representative of a major foundation in our community. He was complaining about the number of organizations that approach him for funds, many of whom tell him, "You have to fund us - you are our last hope. Without this money, we will have to close our doors."

My friend vented his frustrations. "If they haven't proven to the community that they are doing something necessary; if they have not brought the community along with them and made the community part of what they are doing - well then maybe they *should* close their doors!"

And then he focused on the Diaper Bank. "You couldn't kill the Diaper Bank now if you wanted to. The community would not let you."

The key to creating ongoing support lies in my friend's words. How do we build programs the community would not let die?

And the answer is simple: If you build strong relationships between your mission and the community that benefits from that mission - building real friends who really care - that community of friends will not let your mission die. Those friends, your very community, will become your army of support.

Building an Army of Friendship and Support: It's All About Relationships

Picture yourself at a cocktail party. You are introduced to someone you have never met before. In the few moments you have together, this new acquaintance tells you a bit about himself; you tell a bit about yourself. You are interested in learning more about the work he does, about his life. And it is at that moment that your new acquaintance says, "You know a bit about me now. You seem to like me. Would you give me $100?"

Is this any more absurd than how we view "prospective donors"? When we see everyone as a prospective source of money, we ignore what it might mean to have that person as a real friend.

In our own lives, our friends care about us personally, care that life goes well for us, and care about the things we care about. Our true friends help when our kids are born and when our parents grow old. True friends know us so well that we do not have to put on airs - they enjoy just having us around, and we feel the same. Real friends would never let anything bad happen to us, and they will go out of their way to make sure good things come our way.

The same holds true for the friends we make for our organizations. Real friends will volunteer; they will arrange for speaking gigs; they will provide in-kind gifts; they will introduce you to others who might want to be your friends as well. They will sit on advisory panels regarding your mission and counsel you on your programs. And yes, they will donate cash.

I don't know about you, but I would rather have that sort of friend than a mere donor any day.

We humans are so capable of getting what we aim for. When we ask for money, we raise money. But when we focus on raising money, we are always wishing we had more friends.

When we aim for friendship, we build relationships. We ask for friendship, and we get all the amazing things that come with friendship. Money becomes just one of those many gifts.

So in answer to my friend's shock that I had raised so much money while being intimidated to ask for money, here is what I had learned without knowing I had learned it: To build programs the community will not let die, we need to stop focusing on money. We need to start building an army of friends, an army of support. Those friendships are the key to building sustainable efforts to improve the quality of life in our communities.

Who We Are

Dimitri Petropolis and I began consulting to nonprofits in 1993. For the first few years of our consulting practice, we used the same tools most other nonprofit consultants use. The results met our clients' expectations, and through referrals for a job-well-done, our business grew.

But after a few years, we became frustrated. While the results of our work met our clients' expectations, those same results did not meet our own expectations. We had chosen this line of work in the first place because we wanted to use our skills to help make our world a better place. Yet the classic "nonprofit organizational development" tools - strategic planning, fund development planning, marketing planning, board development, etc. - were achieving neither large-scale community impact nor organizational sustainability for the nonprofits we worked with.

In 1997, that frustration led to the commitment to reinvent those nonprofit tools, to ensure nonprofits had everything they needed to make our communities better places to live. We dedicated ourselves to rethinking all our assumptions. Why did we believe what we believed? What made an approach the "right" or "wrong" approach? And we spent years developing new tools and methodologies, testing those approaches with clients and seminar attendees, going back to the drawing board to tweak some more, and then re-testing again as we went along.

But That Is Not the Whole Story

There is a second half to this story. And that half starts way back when we celebrated surviving our 1st year in business by creating a cute and funky holiday giving effort - a Diaper Drive to help two organizations in our hometown of Tucson, Arizona.

By the time the years rolled by and we were at the point of questioning our consulting tools, our annual December Diaper Drive had become so large, it had outgrown our capacity to keep running it as our personal act of philanthropy. We set out to create a Diaper Bank, to ensure this much-needed commodity would be provided year round. After looking around to learn how other Diaper Banks worked, we soon found we were about to form the first Diaper Bank in the country, and perhaps in the world.

As if running a business and starting a nonprofit were not enough to keep us busy (not to mention our two families with young kids), the publicity the Diaper Bank received in those early years caused a ripple we had not counted on - demand for the same service in other communities around the world. And that led to our heading up the road to the big city - Phoenix - to build a second diaper bank, the Valley of the Sun Community Diaper Bank.

Community Focused

It has now been many years since the epiphany that there had to be a way for nonprofit organizations to provide more lasting benefit to their communities. Over those years, we developed and adjusted our tools and approaches with clients and workshop attendees. We used those tools to create and then operate two start-up organizations. We tested and retested.

After several years, it became clear that we were no longer working on "new tools." What had developed was instead a comprehensive and overarching approach to the way nonprofits do everything they do - a whole new model. It is a model that addresses the question of community impact from the inside out, focusing organizations on accountability for the mission, sustainability of that mission, and most importantly, substantial improvement to the quality of life in our communities.

These are *not* business approaches adapted for the nonprofit world. Instead, these approaches were developed specifically for the realities of life inside organizations whose sole purpose is to make the community a better place to live. They are approaches that focus on both the end result - community impact - and the means to achieve that impact.

A true community focus means just that - boards focusing their primary accountability on providing impact for the community. That we stop talking about why we cannot provide that impact, and that we instead focus on ensuring we have the means so we *can* provide that impact. That we stop seeking short term funds at the expense of long term ability to provide the mission. That we engage the community in everything we do, because we are more powerful when we do our work together than in a vacuum. And that working with the community means building long term relationships based on mutual benefit and trust - real friendships between those individuals and the missions of our organizations.

As Jim Bostic, Executive Director of the Nepperhan Community Center in Yonkers, New York told us after flying 3,000 miles to attend one of our workshops, "This is a far more intelligent way to run our agency."

The strategies in this workbook all stem from that model. They are all aimed at making your organization more community-focused, seeing both short term survival and long term sustainability within the context of long term improvement to your community's quality of life.

All of Which is a Long Way of Telling You What This Book Is About

This book is intended, first and foremost, as a guide to FriendRaising, a Community Engagement approach for boards to connect the community they love with the mission they are passionate about. We have two goals in writing this book.

First, it is our goal that your community become so deeply integrated into the fabric of your organization's mission and vision, that the community would never let your efforts die. Because one look at your organizational chart will show you that your board is the link between your organization and the community to whom you are accountable, there is no group more logical to build that army of friends than your board.

Which leads to the second goal - putting to rest the ridiculous notion that the most important part of being on a board is fundraising, and vanquishing the myth that the best Board Members are those who bring in the most money. Board membership is about governing and leading, and a big part of that is what is often called the role of Ambassador - providing the link between the organization and the community you serve. And so our second goal in writing this book is that, after all these years of feeling inadequate, every Board Member will finally feel he or she has found a meaningful way to support the heart of the organization's mission, building friendships that provide all sorts of benefit, rather than just focusing on money.

To accomplish this second goal, this book presents a smorgasbord of possibilities that both board and staff can happily use to make friends and engage them to support your work.

To accomplish that first goal, though - the goal of deep community engagement - you will find that this book presents a whole different way of seeing your organization's position in the community than most of us are used to. Most organizations are accustomed to focusing inward, trying to survive. When we turn that focus outward, though, we see that we are really all in this together - that it is not "our organization" in here and "the community" out there. By creating a Community Engagement approach to building sustainability for your mission, you will begin to work with all those individuals who make up your community, seeing them as part of the fabric of your organization, because each of their lives is somehow affected by the work you are doing. When we use FriendRaising to engage those community members as real friends, we are linking arms to create substantially more impact in our communities.

This new way of being grows slowly in some, and comes as a jolt of sudden enlightenment to others. But the more friends you raise, and the more you begin to see how easy it is to bring the community into your organization while bringing your organization out to the community, the more you will see that this approach to sustainability simply makes sense.

That is because friends will help with everything. They will volunteer and they will make connections. They will give advice about the mission and the community, and yes, you can even ask them for all kinds of stuff, including money.

This book is not intended as a primer on Community Engagement for your whole organization. That overview and step-by-step guide to developing a comprehensive community engagement plan can be found in the companion to this book, the *Community Engagement Action Kit.*

Instead, this book is a compendium of strategies for making friends, keeping friends, asking friends for help, and being a friend yourself, all with the intent that the community can only be a better place if we all work together. And while this book will spark ideas for anyone seeking to make friends for their organization's mission, this is specifically a guide for boards, because boards desperately need a more effective approach to their ambassadorial role.

Work Your Board Will Be Happy to Do

As you will see from the strategies in this book, FriendRaising activities are the kinds of efforts every Board Member will be excited to participate in. When we stop telling Board Members they must raise funds, and we provide them instead with a variety of ways to help build relationships that will support the organization's mission at its core, your Board Members will begin to make friends everywhere they go.

This approach is energizing, as it asks Board Members to tap into the abundance of resources your organization's friends do have, rather than the large piles of money they may not have.

By taking this approach, you will never again have to cajole, because your Board Members will want to help.

They will want to help because the efforts are not intimidating. Board Members never have to worry if it is the right time, or the right approach, when all they are asking for is friendship.

They will want to help because the efforts are all focused around the mission, the reason they have joined your board in the first place.

But mostly, Board Members will want to help because making friends is, quite simply, fun.

Our Board Doesn't Know Enough!

When we teach these approaches in sustainability workshops, participants often approach us privately, embarrassed to tell us, "Our board doesn't know enough to do many of these activities." That may be true for your board as well.

That is why #1 of all these strategies is to get to know your organization better. If your Board Members do not know the things they need to know to accomplish these strategies, the impact of that lack of knowledge goes far beyond their ability to help provide support. It impacts their ability to be accountable for what the organization is and does - their ability to govern effectively and proactively overall.

The side benefit of this learning is therefore obvious: Once your Board Members know enough about the organization to do these activities, they will be far more capable leaders as well.

Using This Book

This book is intended to take your board through the various stages of preparedness for engaging with the community. It is a workbook, and we hope you will use it as such, writing in it and scribbling ideas in the margins.

Part One will help your board prepare to take on the task of engagement. What do we need to know before we get started?

Part Two focuses on making friends. How do we engage our personal friends with our organization's work? How do we meet entirely new friends?

Part Three looks at the types of groups found in every community - businesses, schools, congregations, and the like. That section then provides pages of strategies for engaging each of those groups to become part of your army of friends.

And lastly, in Part Four, we will bring it all back to the reminder that to make a friend, we must first be a friend ourselves. Here you will find the motherly admonition that prior to heading out to ask others for help, each Board Member should be engaging in as many of the activities in this book as they will be asking others to engage in. We cannot ask others to do what we are not willing to do ourselves.

As you read through the many strategies that follow, we have a few words of advice.

First, pace yourselves. Don't dive in, trying to accomplish all these ideas at once, or you will quickly burn out. Choose one or two strategies that make sense for your whole board, and perhaps one or two additional activities that each Board Member might want to do on his/her own as well. Attempting to do all these activities at once will make you exhausted - and that is certainly not the point!

Second, adapt what you find here. Not all activities in this book will work for every board or every Board Member. Use the ones that make sense for you, while adapting the essence of some of the others to see if you can create a way that works for your board and accomplishes the same result. And we are excited to hear about the new ideas you come up with as you use these strategies to jump start your own thinking.

Third, once you have tried one or two activities and seen how easy they are to accomplish, consider creating a Friendraising / Community Engagement Committee, who can help develop and implement a Friendraising / Community Engagement plan. This item is addressed more completely on page 22.

Lastly, in the words of the old Nike ads, just do it. Try something, anything. Go for it and let your successes energize you to do more.

About the Examples

One last explanation before we dive in. Originally, the examples throughout the book came from a broad variety of sources. Because we have been using this approach with clients and workshop attendees for a long time, we had a range of stories to share.

But upon reviewing an early draft of the manuscript, Jane Tennen, Director of New York University's George Heyman Center for Philanthropy & Fundraising, said, "You originally learned how to do all this by actually doing it with the Diaper Bank. You learned it the hard way and can now share it from that perspective. Instead of trying to be even-handed, why not just tell the story of how two crazy people succeeded in starting and sustaining a nonprofit?!"

So we took Jane's advice. The narrative thread throughout the book is the story of how our tiny private philanthropic effort not only became the world's first Diaper Bank, but became a prime example of how community-focused an organization can be at its core. There is barely an approach in this book that we have not tried, tweaked, and re-tried with the Diaper Bank, as we basked in the ability to use our own "baby" to test our theories and new approaches. (There may be a situation or two where a client's or colleague's work is so exemplary that we cannot help but use their example, but we have tried to stick to our own as much as possible.)

As you see how we have used these strategies, we hope these examples will inspire you to try them for yourselves.

A Note about Social Media

While social media is an important part of your organization's engagement efforts, this book will not emphasize that aspect of engagement.

There are 2 reasons for that:

- **There are already hundreds of books specifically about that topic.**

- **There are few books that focus on the experience of making friends in real life.**

Therefore, while social media will be mentioned in these pages, the primary emphasis of this book is the magic that happens when we make friends in our real life communities.

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AfterWords

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by Hildy Gottlieb
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