THE STEINHARDT FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH LIFE

CONTACT

SPRING 2010/SIVAN 5770 VOLUME 12 NUMBER 3 THE JOURNAL OF THE STEINHARDT FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH LIFE

NEW TRENDS IN FUNDRAISING

THE ELUSIVE FUNDRAISER: A COMPLEX SITUATION WITH SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

by AMY L. SALES

A few years ago I worked on an analysis of the putative shortage of fundraisers for the Jewish community. Was recruitment or retention at the source of the problem? Was the dearth of fundraisers most acute at the entry, middle or senior level? And was the problem intractable or amenable to intervention? Months of study found the answers to be "yes, yes and yes." (Amy L. Sales and Nicole Samuel, *Developing the Developers,* Brandeis University, 2007.)

COMPLEX SITUATION

The shortage of fundraising professionals is the result of a complex set of structural, human resource and organizational issues that have increased the demand for well-trained development professionals.

Structural issues. Jewish communal institutions have come to realize that in order to survive and thrive they must embrace the best practices of nonprofit management, including fund development. Less than a decade ago, it was rare for Jewish summer camps to have a development director; today, at least 40 do. The same holds true in the synagogue world. As these institutions improve their business practices, they inevitably add to the demand for fundraising talent in the Jewish community.

Moreover, in the past decade, nonprofits in the United States have proliferated at a high rate. Since it is not uncommon for fundraisers to move between Jewish and secular agencies, Jewish organizations must compete for development talent not only with other Jewish organizations but with nonprofits writ large.

Demand for professional fundraisers in the Jewish community is also driven by an increased need for dollars — a result of a rising demand for services, higher costs of doing business, and a pent-up need to raise the quality of facilities, programs and services. In addition, a shift in federation funding from core operating support toward targeted grants has forced local Jewish organizations to raise a greater percentage of their budgets from outside sources.

Human resources issues. Fundraising professionals have high turnover rates. In the Jewish sector, the intention to seek employment elsewhere is highest among development professionals as compared with all other job categories. Turnover is related to burnout and lack of job satisfaction, but it is also exacerbated by the fact that "poaching" is one of the principal ways that Jewish organizations find fundraising talent. A study by my colleagues at Brandeis found that in the past two years, almost half of those working in development in the Jewish community had been approached by other Jewish organizations with job offers (Shaul Kelner, Michael Rabkin, Leonard Saxe, and Carl Sheingold, *The Jewish Sector's Workforce: Report of a Six-Community Study,* Brandeis University, 2005). Instead of cultivating new talent, these organizations simply woo existing talent.

Organizational causes. Organizations recognize the need for fundraising professionals, but they often do not know how to work with them. Here is a common scenario: A Jewish organization hires a development director. Delighted with the choice, the CEO and the board wash their hands of the development task, believing they have solved their fundraising problem. At the end of the year, the organization fires the development director because she has not raised enough money, and it begins the search for her replacement. The problem here is a mistaken belief that the development professional has the sole responsibility for raising funds for the organization.

SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

The fundraiser problem is complex but it can be ameliorated by increasing the talent pool, building support for development professionals and changing the mindset of top leadership. I refer to these as "simple solutions" not because they are easy but because any one of them could make a significant difference.

Increase the talent pool. With support, Jewish communal service and professional leadership programs could train more students for careers in development. Funded scholarships for advanced degrees with a specialization in development would attract and prepare more professional fundraisers in the Jewish community. Their degrees would put graduates on a level with other executives and accord them the respect and power they merit and need in order to do their jobs. Funded internships would give Jewish young adults an opportunity to try out a career in development, gain experience and skills, and build their resumes. The internships would help Jewish organizations create stronger career paths in development. As interns become junior members of their organizations, others can be moved up to higher level positions.

Support for continuing education and professional development for those already working in the field would raise the level of an organization's in-house expertise. Foundations and federations have funded programs, but have not required grantees to build their capacity to raise the monies needed to sustain these programs in the future. They could easily do so by making training, education or planning a condition for grants and covering the costs of such activities.

Build support. Over the past year, the Fisher-Bernstein Institute at Brandeis University has worked with a cohort of Jewish organizations in Development at the Core, a program designed to help them create a "culture of fundraising." Participants say that the network of colleagues is perhaps the greatest benefit of the program. Indeed, development directors have little contact with others in their profession and few trusted people to turn to for support and advice when the going gets tough (as it frequently does). In this vein, much could be done to create communities of inquiry, a professional association or regular gatherings of development professionals in the Jewish community. By defining a field of practice and providing support and motivation, such structures could attract and hold talent while raising the level of practice.

Change the mindset. As per the scenario above, executive directors and boards of trustees of Jewish organizations need to understand that fundraising is *everyone's* job, not just that of the development director. In Development at the Core, we have been re-educating leadership on the shared role of the development professional and the organization's various stakeholders in the fundraising task. It is challenging work but where breakthroughs have occurred, fundraising has increased many times over.

Changing the mindset also entails the study of Jewish teachings that underlie the work of the fundraiser. Study reminds the development professional and top leadership of the importance of this work and its profound purpose and meaning. As one of our students said of Jewish textual learning, "It made me feel I'm doing what I was meant to do." Our tradition has a built-in mechanism for sustaining those who secure the funds for the wellbeing of our community. We should use it often and well. ■

Amy L. Sales, Ph.D., *is Director of the Fisher-Bernstein Institute for Jewish Philanthropy and Leadership at Brandeis University and of its signature program, Development at the Core.*