

Case for Support: What Are You Raising Money For? Inquiring Minds Want to Know.

Excerpt from “The Philanthropy Therapist”

I once worked for a CEO who did not understand why we couldn't just go ask a donor to give based on this one simple premise “You have it, we need it – give now.” Ouch. If only it were so simple.

What you are raising money for is called the Case for Support – a term most development officers know well. It is also something that is not used nearly enough. Harold (Si) Seymour, who is considered a guru in the field and published one of the most quoted books on fundraising in 1966, Designs for Fundraising, said the case for support “tells all the needs to be told, answers all the important questions, reviews the arguments for support, explains the proposed plan ...” And (I love this part) “it should aim high, provide perspective, arouse a sense of history and continuity, convey a feeling of importance, relevance and urgency, and have whatever stuff is needed to warm the heart and stir the mind.”

I think it is very sad that many organizations do not put in the time and effort to develop a good, solid case for support. We jump into our annual appeals and devise the “crafty” letter that will generate a response. We host an event and speak for 5 minutes about something we think is compelling. Or we meet with a major donor about the newest “project” and expect him or her to give generously. The end result is donors who don't really understand who you are, what you do and how you are changing the world for the better. We seek the 30-second sound byte for the quick response rather than the thoughtfully inspired story that builds the relationship.

Writing a case for support need not be laborious. I happen to think it is one of the more enjoyable aspects of preparing your fundraising plan. It does require a vision, clarity of thought, and the willingness to commit to paper a plan for the future. Once you have done that; however, you can build a culture around a shared cause that is well understood and well-articulated by everyone: staff and volunteers alike.

If you're not sure how to begin – then bring together some key “players” in your organization for an hour or so to put the basics down on paper. Ask the basic and sometimes difficult questions: What do you do? What programs do you offer to do the work that you do? Who do these programs impact? In what way? How have they succeeded? How many more people do you need to help or reach with your vision? What do you need to do that – and how much will it cost? See -- it really isn't that hard.



Then find someone who is a good writer to pull it together with heart. Share the background of the organization. And tell some stories – stories of hope and joy.

If your organization is a large one with many different types of things you do – then write a “mini-case” for each. If you are going into a campaign – then prepare a comprehensive case that encompasses all aspects of what the campaign will accomplish. The principle is the same.

And so is the outcome ... people will be moved, inspired, understand how they can make a difference – and they will give truly from their heart. And most important – they will continue to give as long as you show them how they can and have made a difference.

Now – write your case and go forth and raise the funds.