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Keynote Address at the 2011 Quaker Fundraisers Gathering

Thank you so much for inviting me. I am really excited to be here. Excited because I have always felt that fundraising was God's work! It has been said that one of the best gifts you can give someone is to invite them to contribute to a noble cause. How better to honor that work than to come together to listen to each other and learn from each other. It is a privilege to be here with you to kick off this important conference.

As I thought about how to approach this opening session this evening, I came to the conclusion that my own journey and some of the stories that come from it are the best way to share my insight about fundraising and how to get everyone in your organizations on board.

I'll start with a story I heard just a few days ago. A very accomplished woman I know was getting a prestigious prize for leadership. She stunned the audience when she told the story in her acceptance speech about how it was miraculous that she was awarded this prestigious prize since she flunked 8th grade...every subject! She grew up in Delhi, India and studied at an Irish Nun's Academy. She was a straight A student like her older sister until 8th Grade. The nun in charge of 8th grade treated this girl like she didn't have a brain. Always saying negative things and never supporting her to succeed. The young girl's self-confidence eroded, which resulted in her failing the grade.

Her mother, a very smart, sincere and courageous woman, decided to take things into her own hands. She met with the nun, and then with the Principal and made an agreement that they pass the girl to the next grade (9th Grade) and during that year that nun would both personally apologize and make a special effort to reinforce positive behavior and attitude to the girl every day for that next year. The mother wanted to hold them accountable for turning the situation around, and in the process empower her daughter. And it happened! Not only did the girl pass her grades with flying colors, but she went on to become one of the top-most advocates for women's issues in the world. She is currently Deputy Director of UNICEF.

There are two critical teachings for fundraising embedded within this story. One is your "product" has to be excellent! You must believe in it. Whether you are raising funds for a school, college, retirement home, hospital, direct service organization or any other nonprofit, as a leader, a leader at any level you must work to ensure that your organization is doing excellent work.

Secondly, you must have in place a management group who can listen to their constituents, care about them and make changes through careful and thoughtful analysis... otherwise; you won't have a snowball's chance of raising money.

I have worked in the non-profit sector for over 40 years in various capacities -- I led capital campaigns, managed staff, advocated for human rights and economic justice, and I sit on the boards of several different organizations. With all of this I have gained some valuable insights and wisdom

- The CEO must have a deep connection to the organization's mission, vision and values. The field work or classroom work or whatever the work of the organization is - must resonate with him/her as unique and valuable.
- On fundraising and friendraising the CEO must initiate events and conversations to introduce and reinforce your programs as well as your accomplishments on fundraising to the people who care. "Everywhere I speak I am always asked 'what about the poor and hungry in the US – Why should we help people in the developing world. The answer is you should do what your heart tells you to do. If you want to work for food security in the US, please be my guest – there is no competition here. Everyone who wants to help should do so. In their own way. But – the CEO needs to engage in the conversation.
- Strong, clear, visible and impactful programs attract dollars. So the first order of business for the CEO is to ensure that the organization has a strong vision, and a clear mission. The organization must be highly visible in the community. From my experience this is sometimes hard to do especially in faith-based organizations where it's like "herding cats" and folks want to keep their light hidden under a basket – I was absolutely delighted when I learned of the theme of this conference – The Pearl Within! Wow! I said to myself this – is exactly the right way of thinking.
- In partnership with the fundraising team the president should design initiatives that will inspire various constituencies to make contributions – small and large. People who give money should feel vested in the projects they contribute to.
 - I took two specific actions when I became the President & CEO of The Hunger Project. The first was to visit several of our programs. I saw with my own eyes the impactful work being done on the ground – women and men throwing off the shackles of oppression changing their mindsets (caused by generations of "being helped") to helping themselves to meet their own needs and those of their families.
 - And then I met with as many of the donors/funders (we call them investors) as I could in the first 6 months. The CEO must listen to the donors and care about their needs and values – the same way as he/she would the needs of the field staff and village partners or classroom teachers.
 - These early conversations allowed me to understand what was in place, what needed to be added, and create specific goals for fundraising that hopefully would help us achieve our overall mission.
- It is also important for the CEO and members of the fundraising team to make a financial contribution to the programs they are advocating others to fund.

- This is very important to me and usually being close to the work and being passionate about the mission it makes the contributing or investing part easy
- It is also critical for the CEO to empower the entire Board of Directors to guide and to fund the programs – that includes giving themselves.
- Fundraising must be part of the CEO’s portfolio – he/she must be willing to devote time and energy to the process, be willing to be trained and learn in the action. One must also be willing to make mistakes and learn from them
- Let me give you 2 quick examples of mistakes I made. About 5 months after I started at The Hunger Project, one of my Hunger Project Board Members, introduced me to a prospective high-level donor. He was one of her professional colleagues in a huge banking conglomerate. As I prepared for this meeting,
 - I was briefed by fundraising staff that he was a Teddy Bear, been to a couple of events, cared about us and had given \$5-\$10K periodically. I was only in the job 5 months and had wanted to meet some potential donors. As it turns out, I could not, for the life of me, make a connection to this guy. Every attempted conversation ended in yes/no. Every comment got almost a mild argument in return. I found him somewhat combative.
 - He let slip one point: that he had a lot of money and the only time there was a spark between us was when he said his son went to a Quaker School...AHA! That was it I thought...but no, we couldn’t get a conversation going around that either. We ended the lunch with the requisite “we’ll have to get together again soon”!
 - Later that afternoon the board member called me to debrief the meeting. She said that when they were walking back to their office she asked the prospect what he thought of the meeting...He said “well...she didn’t ask me for any money and she didn’t ask me for my rolodex.” My board member recovered nicely by saying that she didn’t think that was my style - to do something that quickly
 - I was stunned. In my quest to not be aggressive in my first meeting, I had somehow fallen short. It has taken me 7 months to get another appointment with this person, and believe me I will be prepared.
 - Another story is something that happened to me while I was General Secretary of AFSC and is the exact opposite. A major gift officer and I got an appointment to visit a very well known and wealthy individual who had been giving at the 50k level, although her giving was episodic and there was no close relationship. When we did a feasibility study this person was visited and the intelligence that came back to us was that she was “ready” and anxiously looking for an organization who was particularly compatible with her. Since we were in a Capital Campaign mode, we decided to ask her to invest \$1M pledge over 3 years since we knew she had the capacity. After a lovely lunch where we described the goals of the campaign (which directly matched what she wanted) I graciously asked if she would consider \$1M over 3 years. She burst out laughing and kept laughing for what seemed like hours – but I knew was minutes. Can you imagine? Finally we finished lunch and as we were leaving – She said she would do something - but not \$1M and (if you will excuse my language) she also said she admired our piss

and vinegar. She ended up giving \$100k. In both of these cases – one where I was too aggressive and one where I was not aggressive enough I learned an important lesson. “Everyone makes mistakes – if you’re not making mistakes – you’re not taking risks. The key is to take reasonable risks and learn from those mistakes.

- There are a couple of other more technical aspects that the CEO must master and share in the domain of fundraising:
 - Ensure that the development unit has a fundraising plan
 - Work with the team to develop a powerful case for support, and participate fully in cultivating donors.
 - Ensure that appropriate investment and spending policies are in place.
 - Understand the need for and participate in designing Gift Acceptance Policies, including Planned Giving & Endowment policies.
 - Ensure that the organization’s managers – both program and finance -- understand and manage the complexity of restricted or earmarked funding and the reporting requirements that go with it. I could tell stories about this that would curl your hair – but I won’t get into them now.
 - And finally, ensure the organization has a fundraising team that is creative, fearless, committed to excellent programs, great communicators and able to reach out to new constituencies to maximize fundraising.

Some people want to know – “why do you continue to do this work”? – “Schlepping suitcases, crossing time zones, getting shots to protect against exotic diseases”, trying to sleep while sitting up in an airplane.

Like you – I do it because my passion makes me. I do it for the young woman who had acid thrown in her face by a rejected suitor in Bangladesh – and watched in pride as she had him arrested and prosecuted.

I do it for the woman farmer I met in India who proudly told me that of the 35 wells in her village only 1 had arsenic – down from 20.

I do it for the 3 women I met in Uganda who started a successful catering business with a \$100 loan from our microfinance program.

Whatever the business of your non-profit is....the key is “finding that pearl within and passionately sharing it with those who care”

I look forward to continuing this conversation now with a dialogue. I urge you not only to share your questions but also your wisdom and stories.

Thank you.