

Think. Say. Do.

How to build a philanthropic culture in your organization

BY KARLA A. WILLIAMS, M.A., ACFRE

It is all the buzz, this thing called “philanthropic culture.” Everyone wants it, but what is it exactly? And how do you get one?

You have a philanthropic culture when your organization embraces philanthropy as a core value. With this mindset, people build relationships that are mutually beneficial and have impact on the mission. There is an organization-wide investment in fundraising.

A philanthropic culture is most certainly desirable but not so easy or quick to achieve. You must build such a culture. Culture-building requires thought leadership, values-based interactions and a strategic, intellectual and sometimes difficult process. It is more dynamic than didactic, and it takes time.

The measure? People think, say and do the things that make philanthropy an organizational priority. Their focus shifts from counting dollars to valuing relationships and results. Fundraising becomes everyone’s concern.

Are you willing to lead the effort? As a development professional, no one is better suited to inspire an organization to adopt a philanthropic mindset than you are. Your position as the catalyst for philanthropy makes it possible for you to influence virtually everyone else in the organization—to show them by example how to think, talk and act. It will not be easy being a change agent, and it will not happen overnight. To be sure, it will not happen on its own. You will have to own it, but in the end, give everyone else credit for creating it. That is how legacies are built and great fundraisers are made.

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Simply put, you can influence how people in the organization think about philanthropy, what they say to build relationships and what they will do to reach fundraising goals.

THINK

Teach the meaning of “philanthropy.” *Think* you can: “I can exhibit leadership and be a change agent. I will teach the concepts of philanthropy by showcasing how generous people want to partner with us to have an impact.”

Begin by constantly using the word “philanthropy.” If people do not know what you are talking about, explain what it means. Tell them how to spell it, define it and measure it. Give the word context by citing historic events, sharing donors’ stories, quoting community leaders

and circulating human-interest articles. Help people understand that philanthropy is a values-based process that occurs when donors feel compelled to give, not pressured into it, because their interests specifically match an organization’s needs.

Philanthropy is seldom transactional. It is transformative. Remind people that donors do not actually give away their money; they invest it.

It is up to you and your organization to spend it wisely, as intended. Put the word “philanthropic” before the word “fundraising” to show that you are not begging or selling.

As the leader of this cultural shift, you need to get people on board. Start with the CEO. Draft a philanthropic values statement that the leadership team can get behind.

Be sure it is donor-focused. Then, engage board members. Invite them to make a list of their highest priorities for philanthropic gifts (no, not just to get cash to balance the budget). Help them see what can be funded at specific increments: \$5,000, \$10,000, \$25,000 and even \$1 million (or more). Dreams have a way of materializing.

Then, inspire staff. Show them the downside of not being a player on the community's philanthropic map. Remind them that voluntary contributions are the litmus test of their mission's value. Give them all the proper way of measuring philanthropy—measure what it does, not how much it is.

Making the Shift from a Fundraising to a Philanthropic

By ANDREA McMANUS, CFRE

As public scrutiny into the nonprofit sector continues to increase, as fundraising becomes more competitive and more strategic and as your donors become increasingly knowledgeable, it becomes ever more imperative that fundraisers proactively nurture, educate and promote within and outside their organizations an understanding of the relationship between fundraising and philanthropy. You must help your board members, staff, volunteers and donors understand the philanthropic relationship, comprehend what drives it and clearly see its impact on fulfilling the mission. It is up to you to help them connect the dots and cultivate a widespread culture of philanthropy within your organization.

“Charity” is a limiting concept that tends to be crisis-oriented and indicative of a weakness of some sort. And this ultimately leads to the “tin cup” syndrome of fundraising—begging, impulsive, emotional and, worst of all, token in nature.

Philanthropy, however, is a much broader concept, the goal of which is to systematically solve problems. It is based on carefully thought-out plans, building on previous successes, focusing on the community and benefiting many people. In a philanthropic culture, everyone in the organization is comfortable with two definitions of ROI: the traditional “return on investment” and the mission-focused “results, outcomes and impact.”

Consider the following as you help your organization make the shift from a fundraising to a philanthropic culture.

1. Your board and leadership truly understand “philanthropy.”

A new concept? No, actually a very old one, and a critical funding motivator for almost all donors.

2. When someone calls to make a donation, the receptionist knows who you are and what to do.

Make sure all staff knows how to recognize and handle potential donors. Think customer service, competition and internal cooperation.

3. Accountability is something your organization lives by, rather than just paying lip service to it.

The No. 1 reason donors stop giving is because they do not think their gift was used as intended or promised. Be accountable in all aspects to your donors.



Your measure:

- To what extent does leadership value philanthropy? Do they see philanthropy as a way of thinking, talking and doing? Do they value human impact at least as much as they do financial impact? Is everyone willing to promote philanthropy and invest in it?

SAY

Teach about relationships. *Say* you can: “I can show them how to articulate the value of our mission for the entire community. And I will show them that relationships are two-way and sustainable when they are reciprocal.”

Culture

4. You recognize that your primary role is not fundraising; it is building the philanthropic culture in your organization so that philanthropic relationships can survive and thrive.

Your role is not to “get donors,” nor is it to “raise money.” It is to build relationships that result in the formation of philanthropists. Donors and money are the outcomes, and you are the catalyst for social change in your organization.

5. Your organizational leadership understands and acknowledges the difference between philanthropy development and fundraising.

Philanthropy is the motivating value, development is the management of a systematic and strategic program and fundraising is the action. They are distinct but connected.

6. You have a statement of philanthropic values.

Have this discussion throughout your organization, and engage everyone. How do you want to treat your donors? How important are they to your organization?

7. Development is a core function that is long term, strategic and responsive to community needs.

Development is critical to fulfilling your organizational mission. It is a core part of your strategic thinking, planning, direction and action.

8. Fundraising is everyone’s job.

It simply doesn’t work if fundraising is done in isolation. Everyone has a role—ambassador, enthusiastic communicator, connector, cultivator, solicitor, steward.

9. One hundred percent of your board makes annual philanthropic gifts to your organization. Furthermore, your board demonstrates its ownership of fundraising, and all board members participate in fundraising—but not all in the same way.

It is very hard to ask others to support your mission if the leaders in your organization are not making annual, meaningful gifts. Encourage board members to make it one of their top three philanthropic priorities, and be able to lead with both passion and demonstrated commitment.

10. Donors are viewed as stakeholders in your organization.

Donors are not necessary, a burden, rich, your best friends, targets or a nuisance. They are stakeholders who have invested because they care about what you do.

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A Message Just for CEOs

For CEOs, philanthropy is not just a way to generate much-needed revenue. It is one of the principal ways to position your organization as a valuable community asset.

With an entire sector devoted to the philanthropic pursuit of partnerships, philanthropic fundraising is not something to shy away from. It is something to be zealous about. If your organization does not attract philanthropy, you may be sending an inadvertent but contrary message—that you do not need your community’s input or financial support. If you do not fundraise, the public does not have an opportunity to validate its trust in what you do, which could lead to mistrust around your organization’s relevance and value.

As a nonprofit leader, when you embrace philanthropy as “community-building,” you automatically make a compelling rationale for fundraising, which inspires everyone around you—the board of directors, the development department staff, your program staff and volunteers—to help raise money. When you lead the fundraising charge, you affirm that the purpose of philanthropy is to raise the mission, and one way to do that is to raise money. Not vice versa.



How do you teach your colleagues about cultivating relationships to get support for their projects? Every discussion about relationships starts with values. Tell them, as Kay Sprinkel Grace expressed so well, “All philanthropy is based in values. Development of relationships is the process of uncovering shared values. Fundraising offers people opportunities to act on their values.”

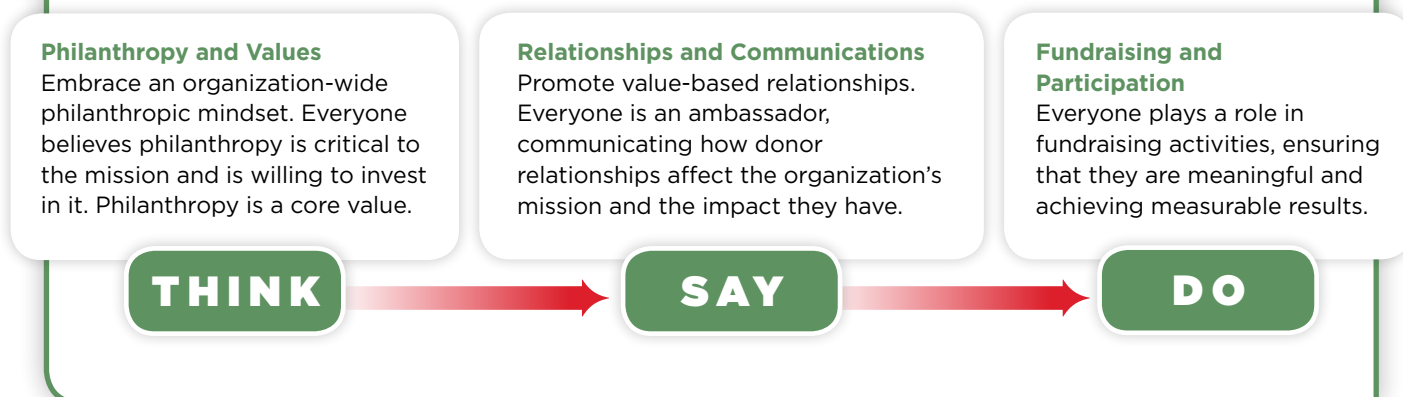
Help them understand that donors want to be partners, not projects. Involving donors rather than just tapping them for cash means “more” comes when dreams are constructed together. Engage program directors in discussions about why donors give to their particular program—and why they do not.

Give examples of how they should talk to the greatest generation differently than to baby boomers and millennials. Board members and staff are fascinated by fundraising psychographics, in part because they affirm their own values in the discovery of knowledge. Explain that “giving” is an individual journey for everyone. You

Children’s Theatre of Charlotte Philanthropic Values Statement

- We embrace our work with passion for our mission, vision and commitment to core values and with an overarching goal to engage the community in our programs—as participants, as advocates and as donors.
- We articulate our story—verbally, in writing and in all materials—with professionalism and enthusiasm.
- We are responsive with donors, participants, prospects and teammates in providing information and creating solutions.
- We conduct our business with the highest degree of integrity, following current best practices in fundraising, from the initial interaction to the stewardship and management of their contribution.
- We take every opportunity to convey heartfelt and genuine appreciation to our donors, acknowledging that when donors begin to feel disconnected, we lose their support.
- We set the standard for valuing the involvement of our patrons by providing exceptional benefits and stewardship to attract and retain donors.
- We remain current on local and national trends in philanthropy and nimble to respond to challenges and opportunities.
- We engage our board and key volunteers in ways that encourage their participation and involvement in the development process.
- We distinguish Children’s Theatre of Charlotte as an organization worthy of investment of time, talent and resources by families, volunteers, foundations and corporations.

Figure 1. Creating a Philanthropic Culture



start by having to give and end up wanting to give. Money does not cause one to give. Generosity and gratitude do.

Introduce donors to everyone at your organization so they can see that “they” are not much different from “you.” Start with the newest intern, and work your way up to the leadership team.

Talk with staff, one-on-one. Ask each what he or she thinks money is needed for, and you will hear about the gaps, the excesses, the hopes and the troubles. Teach them how to articulate their cases for support with clarity, pointing out the mutual benefits to the donors and community. Help them write it, or write it for

Table 1. Philanthropic Culture Checklist for Board Members

Step 1: Answer each question with a “yes” or a “no”

Step 2: Discuss what is needed to turn a “no” into a “yes”

Yes/No	Checklist	Action Needed
	1. I can articulate “why” I was initially recruited to serve on the board.	
	2. I know that fundraising is one of my roles, and I am willing to be an advocate/champion in the community.	
	3. I list this organization as one of my top charitable priorities.	
	4. I make a gift annually, in an amount that I consider “generous.”	
	5. I talk about our organization’s greatest needs for funding, in priority order.	
	6. I am able to quote/cite our success, in outcome measures/metrics/impact.	
	7. I am able to “tell a story” about three different clients/situations/outcomes.	
	8. I personally know at least 10 individual donors, because I solicited them or thanked them.	
	9. I regularly “open doors” and personally invite people to meet the staff or tour the facility.	
	10. I talk about this organization with my friends and colleagues—at work, at parties and even in the grocery line.	
	11. I have hosted a table at the annual fundraiser and followed up with my guests to thank them.	
	12. I am considering a legacy gift to this organization in the future.	

Table 2. Philanthropic Culture Checklist for Staff Members

Step 1: Answer each question with a “yes” or a “no”

Step 2: Discuss what is needed to turn a “no” into a “yes”

Yes/No	Checklist	Action Needed
	1. I believe that philanthropy is essential to the fulfillment of our organization’s mission.	
	2. I can describe the programs/projects that philanthropy helps to underwrite and I know what it doesn’t fund.	
	3. If a donor asked me, I could give at least two or three examples of how philanthropy has an impact.	
	4. I also could give several examples of where philanthropy is needed right now.	
	5. I have personally met and know at least five donors by their first names.	
	6. I have written thank-you letters to donors who have supported a program/project.	
	7. We treat each and every donor as a partner, regardless of how much time, talent or treasure he or she gives.	
	8. Every year, I make my own gift to the staff/employee campaign because I want to be counted as a donor, too!	
	9. When I am with friends and family, I brag about the way donors make our organization “great.”	
	10. The role of fundraising belongs to all of us, and I will do whatever I can to develop strong relationships with donors.	
	11. I not only feel honored to work here but I also consider our organization as one of the leading nonprofits in our community.	

them! Teach them how to be “interested” in donors, in addition to being “interesting.” Make their case examples believable and urgent. Show how other similar nonprofits are using wish lists, videos, social media, human interest stories and, of course, measureable outcomes. Incite a little jealousy.

In a philanthropic culture, people do not feel entitled to philanthropy. They want to earn it. They earn it by making a case that is donor-focused.

Your measure:

- To what extent are donors valued as partners? Does everyone have contact with donors and the confidence to exchange ideas? Is the case for support critical, urgent and compelling?

DO

Teach them about fundraising. *Do* what you can: “I am going to reduce the fear and erase the embarrassment. I am going to show that fundraising is a ‘service’ that helps donors make meaningful decisions.”


Set the tone, and be the role model. Never beg or sell. Make fundraising a natural, enjoyable, respectful and successful activity. Show that fundraising is not haphazard but rather an organization-wide strategy. This does not mean that you want everyone to ask for money. Rather, ask them to assist—to be a conduit of the mission. In a philanthropic culture, virtually everyone (leadership, board, volunteers and staff) has a role to play in successful fundraising.

Identify those roles, make a list, ask for input, give people choices and allow their excuses. They can thank a donor, help write the case statement, make a presentation, refer a client/customer, invite a donor for a tour and even make their own gift. Invite board members, staff and volunteers to be hosts at events. Take them along on a donor visit. Ask them to send thank-you notes and birthday cards to “their” donors. Don’t set goals for them. Allow them to establish their own. They may surprise you and “own” a fundraising campaign. Hold focus groups, and invite them to sit in. Ask them to invite donors to share their stories at their staff or board meetings. Share articles about donor trends, fundraising ideas, etc.

When there is an organization-wide mindset that philanthropy is vital to your nonprofit’s existence, then fundraising practices and processes belong to everyone. They are natural, never forced.

Your measure:

- To what extent do people participate in fundraising? Are board members and staff willing (and prepared) to wear their nametags in public, give elevator testimonials at the drop of hat and volunteer to meet with donors anytime, anywhere?

The bottom line? In a philanthropic culture, mission comes first, then money follows. Donors are partners, not transactions. Board members are ambassadors, not bystanders. Employees are producers, not just performers. Development staff is respected, not shunned. And fundraising is honored, not avoided. 

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A Message Just for Fundraising Professionals

The primary responsibility of development professionals is not to raise money. It is to build a philanthropic culture. The most successful development professionals—those who consistently facilitate the most extraordinary gifts—take their job very seriously and define their role very broadly.

Your fund-development programs are more than narrow fundraising efforts that focus on a campaign goal thermometer. You strive to build relationships that result in the formation of philanthropists (of all financial means), as opposed to getting donors. Your programs perpetuate the philanthropic tradition and nurture the spirit of giving and receiving. In philanthropic cultures, development professionals influence the environment by encouraging everyone to be involved in the philanthropic process in some way.

What is the role of development staff? They are the facilitators, catalysts, advocates, stewards and the conscience of a philanthropic culture. That is how you fundraise.



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