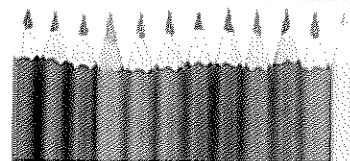


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Board Giving Policy

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Should board members be required to give dollars in addition to their time? Is there a set amount they should give? We hear those questions all the time.

And the answer is yes, board members must donate cash to the organization in addition to their time. And no, there should be no set amount. Why? The reasons might surprise you.

Board Members Must Donate Cash:

Board members need to give more than just their time. They need to give money to the organization, regardless of how much time they donate, and regardless of how little means they have to donate cash.

And before you start to argue that giving of your time should negate your need to also give money; before you start to argue that getting others to give should count against what you give yourself - listen to reason:

Imagine your Executive Director addressing a prospective major donor:

Donor: "Has every member of your board given to the organization?"

ED: "Well some give time, while others give money. And some introduce us to others who give, which we count against their own giving."

Donor: "Well I give my time to the organization - you know that. And I got you that foundation grant last year from our local corporation. So if the people who lead your organization - your board members - don't feel it is important enough to give their own dollars in addition to getting others to give or volunteering their time, why should I give?"

Again, this is a matter of the credibility that comes with walking your talk, and not asking someone to do something you have not done yourself. Imagine this scenario:

George: Hey Susan, will you help my brother move out of his apartment this weekend? He could sure use your truck, and you and your husband are in such good shape - he could really use your muscle and your truck!

Susan: We're happy to help. Shall I pick you up, or should we just meet there?

George: Oh I'm not going - I helped him with something last week. I'm just asking you to help.

Ridiculous? How is that any different from what we expect if we are asking others to help when we have chosen not to?

If a board is to be seen as credible to the donors the organization approaches to give, it is essential that 100% of the board give of their dollars in addition to everything else they do for the organization.

No Set Board Donation Amount:

A good board is comprised of a diverse group of individuals, each with his/her own background and reasons for participating in the organization. If the contribution limit is set too high, many good prospective board members will be excluded because they cannot afford that amount.

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- We have worked with boards that required a given number of board seats be filled by clients who received the service - folks of very little means. In one case, a struggling single mom gave \$1.00 and wept as she did so, telling the ED that she had never been asked to give before, and that she had always felt she was "less than" the other board members, because they gave and she felt she could not.

At the other end of the giving spectrum, once the donation amount is established, wealthy board members may feel, "I gave the requested amount, and that's my gift," even though they have the capacity to give far more than that minimum amount.

- A board we worked with had a \$250 annual giving requirement, and each board member gave \$250. A few of those board members, however, had significant giving capability. Because they were only asked to give \$250 per year, that's what they gave. When that board switched its policy, 2 of those board members increased their gifts to \$1,000 each.

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So what should our Board Giving Policy be?

The following language is clear and simple. It also makes it easy for the board president to follow up annually to be sure everyone has given.

Each member of the board shall make an annual cash donation to the organization. Board members will be expected to give to the best of their means, at a level they would consider generous. *

There is no reason for other board members to know the donation level for each board member; it is enough for the board to know 100% of the board has given to the best of their means.

And with checklist in hand, the board president can follow up annually (perhaps at the annual meeting) to ensure each board member has provided his or her gift.

So don't set a dollar amount. Let board members give to the best of their means, at a level they feel is generous. You will raise money, you will raise credibility, and you will raise enthusiasm among your board members, as they show by example that generosity is at the heart of true friendship.

** We are happy to credit Jeane Vogel with Fundraising Innovations with the words, "at a level they would consider generous." We have loved that approach since we first heard Jeane suggest it. In turn, when we suggest that language to boards, they like it as well. Thanks, Jeane!*



Excerpted from
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