



## **Hiring the Right Fundraiser - 9 Tips for Success**

By Fraser Green, CFRE

As fundraising consultants, we see it all the time....

Non-profit executive directors call us up. They invite us in to talk with them about their development programs. As often as not, the E.D. says, 'We hired a fundraiser two years ago but it didn't work out. Our program has stalled and we're concerned about this happening all over again'. What should we do?'

Why does this happen so often?

It's kind of like buying a car. If you don't know what you're doing, it's easy to end up with a lemon. The same thing can happen when you hire a fundraiser for the first time. Here's how it usually happens...

- Your organization has reached the point where your fundraising has to move up to the next level.
- The board agrees, and strikes a committee (with little or no fundraising background) to conduct the search for a full-time fundraiser.
- Ads are placed.
- Resumes land in your mailbox.
- The committee selects five candidates to be interviewed.
- One candidate in particular stands out. He knows the terminology. He sounds like he can put a fundraising plan together. You hire him.

A year later, little has happened. It looks like your fundraiser talked the talk but didn't walk the walk. You part company – and now you're back at square one.

How can you conduct a fundraising staff search and maximize the odds that you'll find just the right person for the job? Here are nine practical tips to help you minimize your risk.

1. Understand the market. There are more good jobs out there right now than good fundraisers to fill them. Ask yourself – what is it that we offer that can make us appeal to a good fundraiser. Maybe you'll attract people because they love the work you do – whether it's animal protection, environmental advocacy, child welfare or international development. If passion doesn't draw applicants, be sure to offer a competitive salary and benefit package. It's not unheard of for a good fundraiser to earn a larger salary than the executive director does.
2. Write up a description of your ideal fundraiser (it's kind of like your dream spouse). Describe the skills, experience and characteristics that you'd like that person to have. In our experience, good fundraisers genuinely like people. They are willing to ask for money (most of us aren't!). They know how to set priorities and stick to them. They are not afraid to set measurable goals and be accountable for them. They are comfortable in a team setting – but are willing to take individual responsibility for raising money.
3. Now, write the job description of the fundraiser you're seeking. I strongly recommend that you get experienced help to do this. It's not realistic for an organization that's just getting started to create a job where the person is expected to raise \$500,000 in year one and \$1,000,000 in year two – and to be responsible for the golf tournament, the fall gala, the Christmas tree sale, direct mail, an annual telethon, planned giving, foundation grants, corporate sponsorships and donor relations. The biggest mistake we see is that management spreads the fundraiser's responsibilities too thin – to the point where nothing gets done well.
4. Advertise in the right places. Don't spend a lot of money in the major daily newspapers. Target your resources to the vehicles that fundraisers read. Ask your local AFP (Association of Fundraising Professionals) Chapter to distribute your job posting to its membership. Put a listing on the Charity Village Web Site. Look to other fundraising newsletters that are published in Canada.
5. Having advertised, don't wait for advertising to do it for you! Work your rolodex and email address book. Tell everyone you know that you're searching. Most jobs are filled because someone knew someone who knew someone.
6. Have a fundraising professional sit in on your interviews. That professional will be able to help you sort the wheat from the chaff. Where do you find the professional? You may have to hire a consultant, but you can probably find someone at a larger charity nearby who would be willing to give you an afternoon (in fact, people are almost always flattered to be asked to help).
7. Always, always, always, take the time and make the effort to check references thoroughly before offering the job.

8. Be patient. A good hire is kind of like a good marriage. If the first batch of candidates didn't yield the right person, don't feel pressured into offering the job to the best of a mediocre lot. Go back out and look some more. This is a common occurrence in today's market.
9. Finally, be open to people with limited fundraising experience but a solid track record in another career field. Some of the best fundraisers I know came from teaching, journalism, marketing, advertising, and politics – just about any career that involves people, responsibility, pressure and deadlines. A quality person can become a terrific fundraiser. A poor fundraiser never will.

Following these 8 tips should radically reduce your risk of making a poor match when you set out to hire your first fundraiser. With effort, patience – and yes, a bit of luck – you'll find the fundraiser who can catapult your organization to the next level.

#### Bonus Tip

10. Once you've hired your fundraiser, make sure that she plays a key role on your management team. Give her all the encouragement and support you can. Make sure that successes are rewarded – even if it's just saying 'great job!'. Ensure that the fundraiser is involved in your organization's overall strategy development and participates in planning your future. By doing this you'll avoid the risk that she gets snatched up by a better offer a year or so down the road.

Never, ever, forget – really good fundraisers are worth more than their weight in gold!

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