



## **The 10 New Year's Resolutions Fundraising Professionals CANNOT Break This Year**

### **Why Is Change So Hard?**

Happy New Year!

If you're thinking about making some changes this year, you're not alone. If you're like me, you know *what* has to change. You know *how* it should change. And you know *what to do*. Perhaps *this* will be the year. But by mid-January, everything has gone back to the way it was before.

Why is change so hard?

Some years ago, I was invited to give a presentation to the Association of Fundraising Professionals - Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter on the subject of "The 10 New Year's Resolutions Fundraising Professionals CANNOT Break This Year."

That got me thinking about why we set resolutions and why they are so hard to keep.

One of my favorite books, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, gets to the heart of this question. It states:

"Self-control is an exhaustible resource.... When people try to change things, they're usually tinkering with behaviors that have become automatic, and changing those behaviors requires careful supervision by the Rider" – a reference to the rational side of us and contrasted with our emotional side.

The Heath Brothers use this analogy throughout the book to help us understand the internal battle we fight whenever we try to change. They write:

"Our emotional side is an Elephant and our rational side is a Rider. Perched atop the Elephant, the Rider holds the reins and seems to be the leader. But the Rider's control is precarious because the Rider is so small relative to the Elephant. Anytime the six-ton Elephant and the Rider disagree about which direction to go, the Rider is going to lose. He's completely overmatched."

Anyone who's ever tried to diet has experienced the truth of that statement. Usually while scarfing down a whole box of Girl Scout cookies after behaving all day long.

In short, change is always going to be hard and old habits are very tough to break. But good things come to people who can figure out how to make small but important changes in their lives and in their organizations. *Switch* is definitely on my list of recommended reading. It provides excellent strategies for making change by Directing the Rider, Motivating the Elephant, and Shaping the Path.

I have incorporated some of the wisdom of this book and others in my 10 resolutions. Read on.

### **Resolution #1: Set Vision-Oriented Goals and Write Them Down**

The first resolution I hope all fundraising professionals will make this year is to set a vision –oriented goal for the year and write it down.

Do you have a goal?

In the fundraising profession, when we talk about the “goal” we usually mean a dollar goal that we must raise for our organization within the fiscal year. Most of us are motivated to try to reach that goal because (1) we know our organizations are budgeting on that money and (2) our jobs may be riding on it. But that’s not the kind of goal I’m talking about here.

I’m talking about a goal that *you* choose. It can be personal or professional. (You might want to set one of each). It’s a decision you may about what you intend to accomplish this year. Think about that – you’ve got a whole year. What could you accomplish for yourself or for your organization if you really set your mind to it and stayed focused on it all year?

The best goals are based on a vision of the future that’s motivating for us. According to Jim Collins, well known author of *Good to Great*, a vision is an “audacious goal plus vivid descriptions of what it will be like to achieve the goal.” He calls this kind of goal a B-HAG (pronounced BEE-hag) which stands for “Big Hairy Audacious Goal.” A B-HAG is “a huge, daunting challenge that is clear and compelling, serves as a unifying focal point of effort, and acts as a catalyst for team spirit. It has a clear finish line so everyone in the organization will know when it has been achieved.” Amazing things have been accomplished when organizations and individuals are focused on a B-HAG.

In practice, most of us either have a laundry list of 10+ goals we’d like to accomplish in the coming year or a vague idea that we’d like to accomplish something, but we never get clear about what it should be. Neither approach is likely to get us anywhere this year.

To use *Switch* language, setting a goal is important for the Rider – the logical part of us.

“The Rider part of our minds has many strengths. The Rider is a thinker and a planner and can plot a course for a better future. But...the Rider has a terrible weakness – the tendency to spin his wheels.” We shift from option to option, priority to priority, and never get clear about a goal.

When we decide on one goal and write it down, we give clear direction to the Rider, showing him where to go, how to act, and what destination to pursue. The vision-oriented goal is your destination. Change is easier when you know where you’re going and why it’s worth it.

Here’s an exercise to help you create a B-HAG. Think of one goal that appeals to you. Close your eyes and picture yourself when you’ve achieved your goal. (If it helps, you can envision yourself in a dark, old-fashioned theater. The curtains pull back and there, on the screen, is an image of you when you’ve

achieved your goal. Describe what you see in detail. Write about or draw it. The more vivid the picture in your mind, the more it'll help you achieve your goal.

Writing down your goal seems to make it more real, like a commitment – just as picturing and describing it in detail makes it more real for us. And research shows that those who write their goals accomplish significantly more than those who do not. (Source: Summary of Recent Goals Research, by Gail Matthews, Ph.D., Dominican University.)

If you've read the Pollyanna Principles (another good read for nonprofit professionals), then you'll recognize that this advice connects to Pollyanna Principle #1: "We accomplish what we hold ourselves accountable for." Are you coasting and waiting for someone above you to set goals for you? Do you think they will know better than you do what's possible within your department? Why not consider the opportunities carefully and suggest a goal yourself? Create a goal that's a stretch, but attainable and motivating for you. Write it down. Picture it and describe it in detail. Hold yourself accountable. See what you can accomplish this year.

It will be a very memorable, very successful year when you accomplished your B-HAG.

## **Resolution #2 – Take Action. (What's Stopping You?)**

Resolution #2 is to take action on your goal. You may think this is understood in Resolution #1. You've set a goal, so that means you've already promised to take action. But, if you're like me, sometimes the gap between having a goal and taking action seems as big as the Grand Canyon.

What is stopping you from taking the first step?

I believe that fear has a lot to do with it. To continue the simile above, it's a long way down into the Grand Canyon. Watch that first step; it's a doozy!

I once had the opportunity to hear Gloria Steinem speak at the Pennsylvania Conference for Women. She shared an interesting insight about fear. In any endeavor, she said, "Fear is a sign of growth. If you are afraid, it means you are stretching and doing something you haven't done before."

This rings true for me. My greatest fears are usually associated with doing something new. Frankly, I don't want people to see my weaknesses and I'm afraid I won't be good at whatever I'm trying. Or I may have had a bad experience trying this thing in the past, and I don't want to feel like a failure again. (I always remember making my first major gift ask at a lunch meeting with a prospect who wasn't really ready to be asked. I put the amount out there and she choked on her sandwich. We didn't need the Heimlich maneuver but it was a close thing.)

But I've learned something from my frightening early experiences doing major gift fundraising visits. Most people respond positively to us when we share our vulnerability. If we share our fears, they respond to our self-effacing honesty. It helps them know us as real people and feel connected to us. It is

harder for our donors not to take our calls when we've connected as vulnerable human beings. We know that people give to people. They give to someone they know. Be a real/whole person. Show who you are. Do the thing you fear the most and you'll be amazed at the pride, gratification, and new opportunities that open up for you when you take action.

It's not always fear that stops us from taking action. Sometimes, we're daunted by the change we're trying to make. To use *Switch* language (see earlier posts), we have to "Motivate the Elephant" to get started taking action. As with any big change, getting started is the hardest part, because big change spooks the Elephant – the emotional part of us. If we can "Shrink the Change," we can break it down until it no longer seems so daunting.

*Switch* uses the example of the five minute room rescue. If you're daunted by the task of cleaning the whole house, you can set yourself the task of just cleaning up one room for five minutes. Anyone can do five minutes, right? Once you've done five minutes, it is much easier to continue. Getting started is the hardest part.

If we diagram out the actions it will take to reach the goal, breaking them down into smaller and smaller steps, they will seem more achievable and we'll be able to get started. Then we'll have momentum to continue.

### **Resolution #3 – Who has time? Busting the "Time Poverty" Excuse**

So, you're saying, that's all well and good. But I don't have *time* for any new actions. I can barely keep my head above the water. I'm drowning in work here!

That's why Resolution #3 is to do a time study. For one week, write down what you're doing in every 15 minute interval of the day. (This idea comes from Ben Case – a fellow fundraising consultant who consistently recommends this strategy as a way to find time for more strategic activities.) This takes discipline but I've always found it to be a radically eye-opening experience.

Once I do a time study it is easy to see what's getting in the way of my strategic thinking and higher productivity. Most of us have developed bad habits that involve spending time in unproductive ways. Stephen Covey talks about this in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. He divides different types of activities into four quadrants: Q1 Urgent and Important; Q2 Not Urgent and Important; Q3 Urgent and Not Important; and Q4 Not Urgent and Not Important. Most of us spend a lot of time in Quadrants 3 and 4 doing unimportant things that often seem urgent and never getting to the Quadrant 2 activities that aren't urgent but are quite important – like planning.

We need to begin to prioritize the strategic activities that help us accomplish our most important goals. Another way to think of this is to prioritize our "high yield" activities. In fundraising, we have statistics about how much it costs to raise a dollar through different activities. Some activities, such as major gift fundraising, have a very low cost (10 cents) to raise a dollar. Major gift visits are a *high yield* activity.

Whereas, pouring hours and hours into event details may be fun or satisfying, but carries a much heavier cost (50 cents) to raise a dollar.

A time study should help us figure out how to spend more time on higher priority/higher yield activities. If we combine those results with some basic self-awareness, we should be able to create a daily schedule that places our highest priority tasks at the time of day when we're most likely to do them efficiently and well. For example, I know I do my best writing in the morning. Trying to write in the afternoon is like pulling teeth and invariably takes three times longer than it should and almost always leads to re-writes.

Think about what works for you and plan your time around that. If there's a time in the afternoon when you're usually sleepy and it's hard to concentrate, use that time for e-mail and you'll feel productive.

If you've got to get out of the office more – do more solicitations – make it your Monday morning routine to make five contacts – setting up visits or other next actions – before you are allowed to start doing anything else.

To use *Switch* language, use “action triggers” to build these new habits. For example, as soon as I sit in my chair when I first get into the office, I must start writing. (I don't even turn on my e-mail.) If constantly incoming e-mail is your Achilles heel, *Switch* suggests “Shaping the Path” by tweaking the environment. For example, you can cover the spot on your computer that shows the titles of new e-mails flowing in and turn off the sound alert that tells you when a new e-mail has appeared.

#### **Resolution #4 – Read Books and Magazines and Blogs – Oh My!**

With your new found time, my next resolution (#4) is to read books and magazines and blogs. You're probably receiving some of these periodicals on a regular basis and, if you're like me, setting them aside to read later, when I have time. But that time never comes.

Perhaps you see these materials as part of the not urgent/not important category and wonder why I'm now reversing what I said in the last section. But I'm not! It is very important to regularly expose yourself to new ideas. If you don't, where will your next great idea come from?

If you thought I was going to take care of this for you and distill the 10 best ideas out there into a half hour lecture, you thought wrong. I wouldn't be able to do them justice. Besides, with the vast differences in program size and responsibilities of the people in our profession, what's meaningful for me may not be relevant at all for you.

Regardless of where you're working and what you're trying to accomplish, exposing yourself to others' thoughts will help you know what you really think. But, if you're reading something other than your own boiler plate material over and over again, you'll know a good idea when you hear/see it.

According to *Switch*, a big part of motivating the elephant can be accomplished by cultivating a sense of identity and instilling a growth mindset. We need to think of ourselves as lifelong learners, get into learning mode, and feed our brains regularly.

Books, magazines, and blogs are a lot like fuel. We must put some high quality food in to get high performance out. Or, more likely, you've heard the flip side of this statement: "junk in, junk out."

I'd suggest setting aside 15-30 minutes per day for reading. This doesn't have to happen during your highest quality time of the day. Select a time when your mind tends to wander and build a habit of reading regularly at that time. Don't forget to write down the ideas when they start to flow in.

You may want to begin with my list of high quality reads, including the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*; *BoardSource*; AFP Magazine; *Switch*; *Made to Stick*; *Governance as Leadership*; *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*; *The Pollyanna Principles*; and the list goes on.

I've also compiled a list of blogs that I find valuable. Once you look around for a bit, you will likely find others that fuel you. Begin to follow them. There is technology that makes it so easy to keep up with blogs and news we should see on a regular basis.

#### **Resolution #5 – Think.**

There's been a lot written about the power of thinking. Book titles like "The Power of Positive Thinking" and "Think and Grow Rich" come to mind. And there's a bunch of research about how our thoughts affect our ability to accomplish our goals – emphasizing the need to change your thoughts in order to change your life. But even knowing all of this, most of us rarely devote any time or energy to purposeful thinking.

In our fast paced world of stimulus overload and constant interruptions, we spend most of our time acting and reacting. Many of us probably believe we don't have time to think. (See Resolution #3, above.)

My fifth resolution I hope fundraisers will adopt this year is to think. Dedicate some energy each day to purposeful thinking. Quality thinking is a time-saving, change-making, goal-realizing skill.

John Maxwell has written a book about thinking called "Thinking for a Change: 11 Ways Highly Successful People Approach Life and Work." In this and other books, Maxwell recommends daily uninterrupted thinking time. He suggests finding a regular place that is conducive to thinking and keeping a notebook for writing down both the topics for future thinking time and the breakthrough thoughts that come to you during that time. When I do this, I find this time is some of the most valuable of my day. It seems to put me into a more thoughtful, purposeful and strategic mode for the whole day.

If you're not used to this practice, it may be difficult to get started. But it is totally worth the effort. *Switch* suggests we should work to build a habit here. Schedule one half hour of thinking time at the same time each day for two weeks and keep that appointment.

Some of my best thinking time takes place when I find myself at my children's guitar or karate lessons with a notebook, a problem to consider, and no e-mail or phone interruptions. A good idea comes to me and I can actually think it through – because it's not an option to jump up and take action at that moment. Hint – a good idea can get even better with some additional thought. Stay in your thinking place for at least 20 minutes. You'll be amazed at what you come up with – and how much more productive and effective your actions will be when based on clear, purposeful thought.

Sometimes I'm surprised by how difficult it is to stay with one activity (thinking) for even a short period of time. Rapidly changing activities has become a habit for me and my brain seems to demand it. When I try to stay with one thing for a while, I get antsy – feeling like I must be missing something. And I start checking e-mail. I find I have to redirect myself to the task at hand. It helps if I turn off the computer and the smart phone as the extra effort it would take to turn things on again is enough to remind me of my original intent.

At other times, we are stopped in mid-thinking by questions that pop up and seem to need an answer before we can go on. Whatever you do, don't go to Google! Internet browsing time is not quality thinking time. Soon you'll be checking e-mail, making an online purchase, and all of your thinking time goes right out the window. If there's something you need to research, just note down the question and make it a task for later in the day – before your next thinking session.

So, to recap: Once you've figured out your goal, freed up some time, and fueled your brain with ideas and information, taking time out to think each day can help you achieve great things, including making great leaps forward in pursuing your Big Hairy Audacious Goal.

### **Walk the Talk – Give Time, Give Money, Serve on a Nonprofit Board – Resolution #6**

Until now, my list of resolutions fundraisers cannot break this year has been filled with strategies for making change in your personal and professional life so that you can accomplish something great – your big hairy audacious goal. Self-transformation is at the heart of most resolutions, and it's the challenge that makes keeping resolutions so difficult. But I don't want this list to be all about self-transformation, for clearly there are important things in our organizations we should try to change as well. These are things that have the potential to make our fundraising programs stronger, contribute to our profession, and add value in the nonprofit sector.

Those of you who dislike any discussion of “self-transformation” may now breathe a sigh of relief.

Resolution #6 that fundraising professionals cannot break this year is to “Walk the talk” by giving time (as a volunteer), giving money (as a donor), and/or serving on a nonprofit board. I know it is difficult,

when you live and breathe fundraising in your professional life, to consider adding volunteer activities like board service to your list of personal commitments. But there are many benefits to doing so.

First and foremost, there is mission benefit. A cause you personally care about will be advanced because of your time, your money, and your expertise. But, beyond that, there is a tremendous professional benefit that you can receive in the form of learning, growing, and relating to your donors, volunteers, and board members.

How much of your day do you spend complaining (verbally or just mentally) because you're not getting the response you want and need from your donors, volunteers, and board members? Like when one or two board members won't return your calls, and you can't schedule an important group meeting until they do. You may think, "I would never behave like that." And you may be right. But I find I am better at keeping these challenges in perspective when I've experienced it from the other side.

Volunteers asking frequent questions can be annoying when your plate is full with many work-related commitments. But think back, in you can, to a time when you were a volunteer. You probably wanted to do a good job. You didn't have much background, and maybe the instructions weren't 100% clear. You probably thought it better to ask and do the job right than to assume and disappoint. Considering my own volunteer experience helps me think about ways to better prepare for volunteers. Whenever possible, I try to provide an example of final product so my volunteers will know what it is supposed to look like. I try to check in regularly to answer questions that come up so they don't sit there feeling frustrated. And I make sure I tell my volunteers where the bathroom is.

If you've ever served on a board, you know that receiving meeting information at the last minute is a serious problem. A good board member should read and prepare, and last minute information doesn't leave much time for it. Now, you may be thinking, "They never prepare for meetings anyway, so why bother." And there are many board members who don't prepare. But, I promise you, this issue feels different when you're the one trying to fit board service into your life. I really detest taking my valuable time to attend a board meeting where I don't know what's on the agenda and where I'll be asked to help make decisions that will affect the organization without having had time to appropriately consider the issue. Knowing how this feels contributes to the strength of my commitment to do it right. And your organization will be able to attract and retain stronger board members if you commit to following best practices like sending out agendas and background information at least one week in advance.

Donors often insist on a very narrow use of their donations, making it difficult for fundraisers who need to raise unrestricted dollars. We may understand this behavior better if we make a substantial gift ourselves. When it's your hard earned money and you give it to a cause, what do you want to know about how it will be used? What would make you decide to trust the organization to decide where the money will do the most good? It is much easier to think like a donor if you are a donor. And when you think like a donor, you may be able to make changes within your organization that will inspire more people to give unrestricted money.

I believe that donors, volunteers, and board members can feel your sincerity and your empathy. This goes a long way to encouraging their desire to get involved, stay involved, and give more time and



money. Volunteers and donors are not a means to an end. They are generous people who mean well. When we understand their perspective better, we can tweak our organizations to make it easier for them to be involved, to give, and to be satisfied in helping us pursue our mission.

## **Resolution #7 - Advocate**

If I were asked to name the attitude that describes our time, I'm afraid it might be apathy. A large percentage of our country's population doesn't vote regularly. Many of us don't stay informed. Or, rather, we are well informed about the weather, sports scores, and the scandalous behavior of famous people, but not about issues. Lots of us seem to make decisions based on ten-second sound-bites in political ads. Often we don't get involved until an issue directly touches our lives. Sometimes not even then. After all, who has time? (See Resolution #3.) We assume someone else will take care of it.

And yet, we work in the nonprofit sector. That means we're in the business of change. Apathy in our country is a killer attitude for us. We, literally, must be the change we want to see in the world. And we must inspire others to want change.

That's why my Resolution #7 is to advocate. Fundraisers should be agents of positive change. It is very hard to change what others do, but we *can*, for a start, change our own behavior.

Consider what you care about – personally and professionally. Maybe it's the world we're leaving our children; or the injustice of homelessness and the lack of health care for all. Is there a job you'd love to take but you can't because of health benefits? Do something about it!

Consider what's critical to your organization. Have you been affected by government funding cuts? Did you do anything about it? Many proposed changes would dramatically threaten the vulnerable families served by our organizations. If you're like me, you're in this profession because the work is rewarding and because you value the mission and work of your nonprofit. Don't let damaging changes go by without taking action.

There are a number of organizations that make it easier to understand what's at stake and take action. They monitor issues and tell us when it is critical to act. Do so! And support those organizations in their work. Use your social network to influence others to act as well. Our future depends on it.

In the fundraising profession, AFP is keeping us posted on changes to the tax laws that will affect donations to our nonprofits and donors' ability to help us fulfill our mission. When you are urged to take action, do so! Don't assume someone else will take care of it.

In another article, I outlined two great reasons nonprofits should get involved in advocacy, and four ideas for getting started. I hope you'll check it out. Then, consider what really matters to you and take action. Advocate!

## **Resolution #8 – Develop and Pursue a Social Media Strategy**

In fundraising, we know success is all about relationships. It's about who you know, and who your donor prospects trust to tell them where their gift or involvement will do the most good. The challenge for nonprofits has always been building relationships. Our ability to build a broad base of support has depended on our ability to create and deepen relationships with more people – especially those with the ability and inclination to give.

Social media marketing is a tool that allows nonprofits to leverage their relationships with volunteers and donors to attract, inform, and engage new donors. It is a relationship building tool. With so many people using social media, this is one strategy we can't afford to ignore.

That's why Resolution #8 that fundraisers cannot break this year is to develop and pursue a social media strategy.

If you're already there, Congratulations! My sense is that many nonprofits are dragging their feet while asking, "Who is going to execute this new strategy?" "Who has time?" Often, we don't want to do something unless we do it right, and we're daunted by what seems like a steep learning curve. (Consider "shrinking the change" – see Resolution #2 – Take Action.)

Added to that, we're not sure our investment of time and effort is going to pay off. Sure, we've heard that some organizations have raised a bunch of money through social media, but isn't that usually a one-time thing because of a natural disaster? We doubt that our nonprofit will find a way to make social media marketing pay.

A more damaging attitude is thinking that social media marketing is not for us. Our donors are *too old* for social media. Not true! The number of older adults engaging in social media is growing faster than any other group.

Even if it were true that your donors are older and not interested in social media, I have to ask you, don't you want to have donors in the future? Unless your organization is planning to close its doors in ten years, *all* of our future donors are young people. And they are getting their information, and deciding when and where to get involved, through social media. Engaging the younger generation is a challenge we must all face, and social media is likely to be at the heart of any strategy.

Social media strategies are much less costly than direct mail. We can reach potentially thousands for free, attracting event attendees, finding volunteers, and building financial support through word of mouth. Time is the major cost – so it's just about finding the time. (See Resolution #3 – Who Has Time? for help.)

If you decide to get started in social media marketing, spend some quality thinking time developing a strategy before you begin. Educate yourself about how similar organizations (early adopters) are having

success with social media. Think about which of your programs lends itself to a broad based, word-of-mouth engagement strategy. Be intentional – choose one or two media to begin with, then stick with them. Don't be a flash in the pan. Be purposeful and steady and you'll get results.

## **Resolution #9 – Try a Friend-Raising Campaign**

What I hear more than anything from nonprofit organizations is frustration with the level of board participation in fundraising. Boards know this is a problem. In a BoardSource survey, board members gave themselves a “C” in fundraising. When asked to evaluate their boards on this activity, Executive Directors gave their boards a “D.”

Most board members don't like to fundraise. Pleading isn't effective in changing their minds. Many have tried. As development professionals, we must ask ourselves what we can do to make it easier for our board members to help us. A friend-raising campaign could be the answer.

After all, we've all had a lifetime of practice making friends. If we can help board members translate these well honed skills to friend-raising on our organization's behalf, we may ultimately get the fundraising engagement we're looking for.

Most board members find friend-raising more palatable than fundraising. And, in fact, opening doors is one of the most valuable things board members can do for nonprofits. If we can show them how it can be done without awkwardness, they are more likely to do it often.

Here are five ideas to help board members start friend-raising:

1. Share brief, sticky stories with board members that will make it easy for them to bring up the organization in conversation. Think of mission-centered stories that consistently grab the listener's attention (especially the stories that give you goose bumps) and inspire listeners to ask questions. These will make friend-raising much easier for your board members.
2. Encourage board members to “work the room” at events by giving them the role of hosts – welcoming attendees, sharing sticky stories, and offering appropriate follow up to interested individuals, such as, “I'd love to introduce you to our Executive Director.” Or, “Would you be interested in coming for a tour of our facility?” Make it easy for board members to capture information about the people they talk to, their interests, and any follow up they have promised or next steps they deem appropriate by providing forms they complete before leaving the event. (See the Tips section of my website for a free tip sheet on “Schmoozing 101: Working the Room for Maximum Results.” [www.sparknpc.com/tipsheets.htm](http://www.sparknpc.com/tipsheets.htm).)
3. Engage board members in asking their friends (business partners, Rotarians, fellow Chamber of Commerce members, etc.) for help. Not only are we more comfortable asking for help than asking for money, but anecdotal research suggests that we ultimately raise more money when

we begin by asking for help. Nonprofit organizations can benefit from many kinds of advice, feedback, and expert assistance. People like to be asked for help. And when people help they feel connected to the mission in a way that often makes them *more* inclined to give money.

4. Create low threshold events that make it easy for board members to invite their acquaintances to learn more about the mission and decide if they might want to get involved. House parties are an inexpensive but often very effective way to engage new friends with the organization.
5. Identify easy “first asks” that make it less awkward for board members to bring up giving with their friends. Try something like, “By the way, if you’re at all interested in [the mission], we’re telling everyone we know about a fantastic matching challenge for gifts of \$500 or more made between now and September.”

When boards begin friend-raising effectively, they invariably gain confidence in talking to people about the mission and opportunities to get involved. And with greater relationship-building skills like these comes greater fundraising performance and, ultimately, more money for mission.

### **Resolution #10 – Find a Mentor/Start a Mastermind Group**

You’re not just a cog in the wheel. You’re not interchangeable with any other fundraiser. You have different talents than your peers. You have different challenges, personally and professionally, than others. And your organization, though similar in some ways, is also different in ways that make your fundraising opportunities and challenges unique.

But that doesn’t mean that you have to be all alone as you wrestle with your particular opportunities and challenges. I’m a firm believer that development professionals can gain a great deal from using our colleague network, especially the Association of Fundraising Professionals, to help each other improve our performance.

My final resolution (#10) that fundraisers cannot break this year is to find a mentor or start a mastermind group.

You may think that going to the AFP networking event and talking a little shop is all you can expect from your colleague network. I’d like to suggest something different.

It is possible, through AFP or your own network, to find a mentor. A mentor is a person who guides you, who takes a long-term approach to your future, and supports you in nurturing your professional life. According to Lillian Eby, professor of applied psychology at the University of Georgia, “Research indicates that mentored individuals perform better on the job, advance more rapidly within the organization, and report more job and career satisfaction.”

A strong mentoring relationship can add considerable value over the lifetime of your career. I’ve loved the concept of mentoring since I was a junior at Mercy High School in Baltimore and participated in the

mentor program. I had an incredible experience in politics that taught me so much about myself and changed the direction of my life. Mentors are “go-to” people who are there for you in high and low times with guidance, wisdom, and encouragement.

Another idea is to invest in a group of colleagues that agrees to help each other consider the challenges and opportunities that come their way. Napoleon Hill, who coined the term "mastermind," believed that a group of like-minded, achievement-oriented individuals could dramatically leverage each other's success. Mastermind group participants bring commitment, energy and excitement that challenges each other to create and implement goals in a supportive, respectful and compassionate atmosphere. If done right, everybody benefits.

Find a mentor or start a mastermind group this year. You'll be surprised at how much you get out of it.

Let's make it a great year!

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