

Never Underestimate Your Nonprofit's Employees

By Kerry Nenn

The commitment of one employee could blossom into a \$7 million endowment. It's happening at the University of Maine. Head Hockey Coach Red Gendron recently established the Grant Standbrook Hockey Forever Fund by giving back 5 percent of his annual salary. Gendron's initial gift of \$10,450 is being matched by another donor, who has pledged to match all giving by former Black Bear players up to \$1 million. From this exciting opening face-off, the university seeks to grow the fund to a \$7 million endowment over the next five years.

"Coach Gendron had been talking about the need to establish an operating endowment to ensure the long-term health of the program," explains Karlton Creech, athletic director. "He said if he was going to go out and ask others for their support, he wouldn't be comfortable doing so unless he was supporting the program too. Gendron made his first pledge and now uses that as a talking point to bring others on board as well."

Creech notes, "Gendron is invested at all levels, fully committed to the health of the program. He has stepped up as a leader in the department. The hope is to encourage others to model his behavior and do the same." To this goal, the fundraising staff played an integral role in working with Gendron on appropriate messaging, logistics, preparation of materials and rolling the plan out publicly.

The next step for the development team is to take advantage of the matching gift. This phase will involve going out to all hockey alumni nationwide to seek support of the endowment. A campaign committee will be established, made up of former players from each generation. Fundraising efforts will include e-mail messaging, peer asks, phone calls and visits.

"This will be more of a marathon than a sprint," describes Creech. "We are giving ourselves five years to reach our goal and will be offering five-year pledge terms. We will have giving options at any level. Coach Gendron and the rest of the staff will play a part in these efforts."

"A lot of times an organization's employees are taken for granted, or employers feel awkward asking them for support," Creech says. "But it is common to have all-in campaigns, where everyone is asked to give, even if it's only a dollar. The goal is two-fold. We want people personally invested in what we are doing, and we want people to know they can make a difference even at a small level. When everyone is dedicated to the mission of the organization, a sense of camaraderie and coming together happens. It is a very positive experience."

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APPROACHING FAMILY FOUNDATIONS

Be Privy to a Family Foundation's Extended Family

Many family foundations are closed to unsolicited inquiries. The family chooses which organizations to support based on personal contact or experiences with those organizations. A family member may have a friend who serves on a particular organization's board, have read about an interesting organization in the newspaper, or have made personal contributions to a particular organization that he/she would like the foundation to support on a larger scale.

So how can an official who feels his/her organization's mission fits with the foundation's core values get a foot in the door? One way is to find a foundation family member who has had a connection to your organization, either as a volunteer, donor or as a friend of a volunteer or donor. The family member will be able to lobby on your organization's behalf when you decide to approach the foundation for a gift.

This approach can be effective even if the family member isn't on the foundation's board. A spokesperson for one private foundation says they sometimes call a family meeting to choose from a group of organizations to support.

Incentives That Encourage Employee Giving

Although we would all prefer that our employees make contributions based solely on their belief in the value of their employer and its services, additional motivators are oftentimes required to increase the rate of giving participation among employees.

Try these incentives as tools for increasing giving among your organization's employees:

- ✓ Pair different groups within your organization — various departments, age groups, etc. — to compete for the highest percentage of participation.
- ✓ Have a drawing for a donated prize that includes the names of anyone who made a pledge or contribution. Consider another drawing limited to those who signed up for monthly payroll deductions.

Revisit Job Descriptions

Development job descriptions should be documented in your annual operational plan. Those roles and responsibilities, after all, form the foundation of all actions taken throughout the year. In reviewing job descriptions, ask yourself:

- Based on anticipated fund development programs for the upcoming year, what responsibilities might we want to add or drop for each job description?
- Are there any activities this person did in the past year that are not covered by this description?
- What responsibilities might we exchange among existing personnel to make a better "fit" in achieving overall goals?
- What responsibilities might we exchange among personnel based on our existing pool of talent?
- What universal expectations should be included in every job description?

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