

FUNdraising Good Times: Business cards as a prospecting tool

Written by Mel and Pearl Shaw
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Nonprofit CEOs, board chairs, and college presidents are constantly out and about meeting people and picking up business cards. Here's what we know: you can use those cards to stack the deck in favor of your fundraising success.

Business cards also hold the key strengthening your relationship with your development director or vice president for advancement. Our recommendation is tried and true: collect the cards, when you have a moment at the end of the day write short notes about each of your meetings. Send the notes and a photo of the cards back to your staff when you are on the road. Or submit them when back in the office. This gets the names, contact information, and notes about relationships and opportunities into your database. Next step: partnering with your development person.

Call a debriefing session with your development director or vice president. Review each of the business cards you collected. Share with her the key insights you learned from each of your meetings. Working together, prioritize next steps for how to engage each person you met. Some follow up items are simple: sending a report or web resource you discussed; making an introduction; ensuring an invitation to upcoming events is sent. Others are more complex. Perhaps one of the people you met with could assist in evaluating a partnership you want to pursue. Maybe you met a corporate manager who wants to engage her employees in a day of service at your nonprofit. Determine who is responsible for taking the relationship to the next level and by when. Set check-in and follow-up dates with each other and keep them.

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This practice gives you a "door opener" for regularly meeting with your development person, a way to be actively engaged with her in developing new relationships and partnerships. You are sharing contacts and information with her – "bringing something to the table" instead of always asking her how much money she has raised. You are increasing the prospects you both can work with, sharing some details of your work, and creating an opportunity for the two of you to strategize together. This process can be a stimulus for new ideas and perspectives. You can work shoulder to shoulder, learning from each other, co-creating goals and opportunities, and making commitments to each other regarding how to follow up with and engage the people you have met. It can energize you, expand your mind-set and help build a culture of fundraising.

Here are two truths about business cards and fundraising: a card can't open a door if its sitting in a pile on your desk. Your development person can't turn a pile of cards into relationships. The two of you need to work together, be creative, and follow up.

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Mel and Pearl Shaw position nonprofits, colleges and universities for fundraising success. For help with your campaign visit www.saadandshaw.com or call (901) 522-8727.