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Ten Tips for Relationship Building

A guest contribution from the President of Imagine Philanthropy...

Whether you are running your own nonprofit, building a sports program or starting a new business, here are my suggested “Top Ten Methods for Success”. Please note that these are in no particular order although I personally value 1?4 in people I work with! Success will come sooner when all are done well and consistently.

1. **Grow and Engage with Your Contact List** – ask your mentors and friends who they know that can help you with your product, plan, or passions. Keep in regular contact with key people and ask how you can help them. People are more apt to assist you later when you have offered aid for their projects/lives. Volunteer to be on committees or to help others. Send out meaningful updates and stories of your work on a quarterly basis. Identify key skills, supports and/or tangible donations you need and ask people who they know that could help you. Think now about who is on your ‘holiday card’ list.

2. **Ask Questions and Follow Through** – in every communication, be mindful of how often you share your perspective versus asking what is happening in the supporter’s life and how they feel about what you are doing. Ask for money and get advice; ask for advice and get money. Asking for input and authentically inquiring about a person’s work, home or passions is key to building strong relationships. By listening, listening, and listening to what is said and not said, you can follow through with personalized and meaningful information. If you do this, people will ask you how they can help you. Then you can share with them the resources needed by your organization.

3. **Bring Forth a Strong Work Ethic** – people invest in leaders who they see are ‘hungry’ and work for success. When they can see your persistence and authentic belief in what you are doing, followed up with personalized notes and/or customized partnership proposals, they are more apt to support you. Impeccable attention to detail with your work and sequential and coordinated engagement (meet with top contributors 2 times / year, e?mail them monthly, call them quarterly, etc) with key supporters will deliver better results.

4. **Believe and Act in Partnership** – if you are truly listening and engaged with someone, you will hear what their dreams and desires are. At the same time, they will hear yours. By asking for people to

partner with you on your dreams, know that this will be easiest when you genuinely want to build theirs too. Know that this philosophy can be applied to co?workers, investors, boosters, athletes you coach, etc.

5. **Utilize Gifts / Sales to Secure More Funds**– whenever a gift is secured or asked for, work with the supporter to ask how public they will let you be with their gift. Often their gift will allow you to seek a match or create a challenge for others, thereby doubling or tripling their investment. Always think in terms of a gift rate chart and share this with supporters (i.e. we need 10 gifts at $10,000 or $100,000 to do this project) even if you know the supporter can give you the entire amount. Ideally, you want them to give you the names of nine others who can help and the $100,000. Minimally, get permission to publicize the story of the gift with or without their name attached as people want to give to success.

6. **Build a Circle of Leaders and Experts** – whether it is a nonprofit Board or Advisory Council to build your league, business or team, a trusted group of advisors from a variety of key fields (finance, legal, digital marketing, communications) will be critical for success. Be sure to give each person a specific request for help or assignment that the volunteer agrees is a way they want to engage. People want a way to use their talents and that also is considerate and efficient use of their time.

7. **Focus Time on the Top 20%** ? most nonprofits are funded with 80% of the money coming from 20% of the donors. Spending time and building trust and rapport with this top 20% should take 80% of your time. Their relationships, interests, businesses, and values will inevitably lead you to their peer group(s) over time.

8. **Build a List of Benefits for Exchange** – prior to going into the marketplace for underwriters, compile a list of benefits that your business/nonprofit can offer in exchange for ‘sponsorship’. With a menu of opportunities for partnership, you can then customize a relationship that is meaningful. Never overlook the opportunity to provide something of value that ‘can’t be bought’ (i.e., an autograph item from a sports legend or behind the scenes experience with a leader or coach).

9. **Mimic Large Institution Practices to Build Brand**? analyze the tools used by colleges and universities and model them where appropriate. Invite leadership (deans, coaches or top thought leaders) to speak at events or hosted parties (in campus settings or esteemed private homes) to engage with key audiences (alumnae lists or people profiled via technology sources on income or affinity) on a relevant topic. Know that all significantly funded organizations have people designated to doing research on prospects and donors and their ability to give and that in order to be mindful of their entire giving focus and life passions, this is absolutely essential.

10. **Build Visibility via Technology**– utilize new media to tell your story and make timely updates to your mission and team/product’s contributions to the community and society. Continually review your web site to insure relevant information is present. Think of your web site as your living room and you are inviting your investors to dinner. With this practice, you will have an impressive, elegant and impeccable first response by any web visitor. Master the art of storytelling on your web site and in web communications as an essential element in asking for involvement and gifts.

-- by Tuti B. Scott, President, Imagine Philanthropy. Imagine Philanthropy is an international consulting firm that supports funders in effective giving and guides organizations and nonprofit leaders seeking to enhance and energize their work. www.ImaginePhilanthropy.com is a rich resource for fundraising

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