

Getting to the Next Level: What Does It Take?

By Bill Scroggins

Most community college foundations are doing good work, but few could be considered high functioning. How can these foundations – regardless of their age, size or budget – move to the next level? While adequate staffing and resources are of course a factor, it's the college president who plays the key role, serving as the catalyst, architect and cheerleader to get the college's foundation to the next level.

So where do you start?

Let's assume you have just taken an in-depth look at your college foundation: endowment level, annual fund receipts, event costs and revenue, staffing levels and qualifications, board of directors' resumes and yearly contribution levels, donor list and giving history, and perhaps an audit or two. You probably did not find what you had hoped. But what DID you hope to find?

Step back for a moment. Focus on two questions. What would you realistically expect from the existing structure and function of your foundation? What is your vision of a high-performing foundation that would support your goals for the institution? Your vision for the foundation must incorporate today's reality, tomorrow's goal, and a path to connect the two.

Measuring Foundation Performance

Let's start with what we are going to measure. What does a foundation contribute to a college? First, of course, is revenue. That revenue is scrounged for and ladled out in three flavors. Foundations facilitate *donations for student scholarships*, best done with endowment gifts but can also be achieved through annual pledges. Some foundations raise *income to support their internal operations*. Ideally it is best if the foundation can support its own operations, like most four-year foundations do, but because of their size and limited assets, most community college foundations are funded all or in part by the college they serve. Finally, foundations receive donations that directly *support the work of the college*. Typically those donations fund projects, equipment, and/or staffing. Project revenue may arrive through designated gifts or optimally through annual distribution of income earned from the corpus of the endowment. So metric number one for foundation performance is money -- cash (the folding kind).

Not long after my arrival at one of the colleges I served, I started the in-depth look mentioned above. In reviewing financial reports, the various revenue streams were so mixed up I could not figure out how much the foundation was actually receiving in these three areas. Further complicating matters was the booking of college in-kind support (mostly two salaries of foundation personnel) as revenue. It looked like the foundation was taking in quite a bit, but a closer look showed that foundation operating bills were being paid out of the corpus of the endowment, which was almost gone. Not good.

The solution? (Well, at least to the accounting.) We contracted with an accountant who specialized in nonprofits, brought him to the board of directors meetings for three consecutive sessions, and 1) reformatted the books to tag each type of revenue and expenditure, 2) produced report formats that honestly reflected revenues and expenditures related to the budget, AND 3) made sure that the board of directors could understand, and give direction from, the resulting reports.

Beyond accounting, clear and consistent gift acceptance policies are essential to a growing foundation. At another institution where I worked, unclear policies and lack of inter-departmental coordination resulted in sloppy handling of an in-kind donation. The issue stemmed from a piece of equipment that was accepted by the foundation, inventoried by the administration, then sold as surplus by another department – with no communication among the three entities. The value of the write-off was determined by the foundation through certification by an industry professional (at what turned out to be a rather elevated value), and then the equipment was sold to that same certifying professional (although the department was unaware of this). We found out later that the certifying professional/buyer was a friend of the donor. Wrong on so many levels. Needless to say, our process was revised. Word to the wise: get all college parties in the room when foundation gift, revenue and expenditure processes are set up or revised.

Another important performance metric is endowment. The dollar amount in the endowment, both restricted and unrestricted, is as important as the annual cash spent by the foundation on college and student support. It is a measure of future investment by the foundation in the college and the second metric by which to evaluate the foundation.

Most endowments are built through major gifts rather than by annual giving. Thus a very significant third measure of foundation performance is pledges for future major gifts. Planned giving for major gifts cannot be quantified as precisely as cash in the bank, but reporting those outcomes is an essential measure of foundation accomplishments.

Money, money, money. Is that all there is to a foundation? Absolutely not. Foundations are central to the overall advancement of the college. What does “advancement” mean? In this context, it refers to fundraising, public relations and related activities.

As a college president, I spend a major portion of my time building and maintaining relationships: business leaders, elected representatives, government officials, community organizations, service clubs, other educational institutions, and, of course, those at the college. My major purpose in engaging these people is usually not philanthropy, but it is almost always one of the elements of that contact.

I talk about our fabulous new Pathways to Transfer program that accelerates students through the math sequence, and I do not forget to mention that we have limited funds to expand this successful initiative. When I see a spark of interest in the [fill in the blank: business/vendor/partner], I produce a “leave behind” brochure on Pathways to Transfer that has been developed in partnership among the foundation executive director, the marketing director, and the dean of Science & Math. In promoting the college through relationship building, I am also looking for ways to promote the foundation. And vice versa. At foundation events, I look for ways to promote the college. That’s advancement.

Getting the Most from the Existing Foundation Structure

What are the capabilities of existing foundation personnel, current fundraising strategies and projects, and sitting members of the foundation board of directors? Following are a few hints and a couple of stories, but please note that individual situations vary widely.

Let’s start with you, the college president. You are the architect, the visionary, the motivator, the carrot and stick. AND, titles aside, you are the chief fundraising officer. Consequently, take inventory of your knowledge, skills and experience. We all could use more of each of those, so find some training/workshop/conference that seems to fit what you need to refresh, grow and get energized about being the catalyst for moving your foundation to the next level.

Now for the foundation executive director. That person needs to be skilled and experienced in the profession of nonprofit fundraising. Skills include organizational leadership (running a small, underfunded, ill-staffed organization), vision (equal parts rose-colored glasses and blindfolds), and motivational written and oral communication (think of the range from sincere Hallmark cards to motivational speeches). What this person cannot be is low-energy, boring or thin-skinned. Is the executive director licking stamps and answering phones? If so, that time is not being spent building relationships, developing prospects, and making the ask. This is a profession that is a real calling. It is not a job to be reassigned to that person on your staff who has not succeeded at their last three assignments.

Support staff are equally important. Skills should match the organization's strategy. Doing events? Have event planning skills. Managing a prospect database? Have computer skills. Doing alumni contacts, call backs, and board care and feeding? Have people skills. Seems like grade school logic, but you would be surprised how often that personnel can be a speed bump for a foundation trying to get revved up.

Are the foundation staff doing foundation work? Really? One of the colleges at which I worked had one full-time executive director and one full-time support staff. Fundraising produced a balance among scholarships, operations and college projects, and the endowment was growing steadily. The executive director was motivated to get to the next level, and part of the in depth look was at staff. The problem? Scholarship applications, evaluations, awards and recognition was all done inside the foundation. All that consumed a very large part of the support staff member's time. Solution? I moved the mechanics of the scholarship process inside the Financial Aid Office. But then the skills set of the foundation staff member did not match the work of the revved up foundation. Solution? I moved the staff member to Financial Aid as well, and we hired a new staffer for the foundation — with skills to match the new agenda. Both the Financial Aid Office and the staffer were happy with the new arrangement.

Evaluate Foundations by:

- Revenue & Expenditures for
 - scholarships,
 - operations, and
 - designated gifts.
- Endowment Size
 - restricted and
 - unrestricted.
- Major Gift Pledges

Does the makeup of the board of directors match the work of the foundation as it is presently conducted? If the work is "scholarships, socials and saccharine," then you need butterflies on your board of directors. If the work is relationship building, lead development and fundraising, then your board of directors needs people of means and influence.

Vision of the "Next Level" Foundation

There are plenty of community colleges (and college presidents) who are just fine with passing through funds for scholarships and promoting the college through galas and hall-of-fame celebrations. If you want to conduct serious fundraising, though, foundation leadership, staffing, projects and its board of directors should match the vision you have as CEO.

Think of the qualities and characteristics you need as if it were an online dating site like Match.com. Which of the following are important to taking your foundation to the next level?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> CEO is Chief Fundraiser | <input type="checkbox"/> Alumni Database: Gift History |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Highly Qualified Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Alumni Database: Wealth Scores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3+ Skilled Support Staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Alumni Database: Major Interests |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Office Space: Generous | <input type="checkbox"/> Alumni Database: Campus Connection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Office Space: Campus Central | <input type="checkbox"/> Annual Vendor Donor Event |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alumni Database: Contact Info | <input type="checkbox"/> All Events: Break Even+ Friend-Raisers |

- Give and Get board of directors
- Seven- or Eight- Figure Endowment
- Six Figure Annual Fund
- Effective Planned Giving
- A+ College Scholarship Office
- 50%+ Employee Giving
- A+ College Advisory Committee
- Support from Marketing
- Support from finance office
- Support from IT

Did you check them all? If so, you have a vision for the “Next Level” foundation. Now connect your existing foundation with your “Next Level” foundation by developing a strategic pathway.

Strategies aside, sometimes fundraising is just dumb luck. You’re doing the right thing and don’t even know it. A few years ago at another college, I was out in the community proselytizing for the public to vote for a facilities bond. Two of the successful programs I was citing were the nursing school and the fire academy. You know the routine: the helping professions, high percent educated in community colleges, great completion rate, grads stay in the community, heart-tugging stories. In the audience was an elderly lady who previously had a stroke, was quickly revived by a firefighter and then served lovingly by a nurse in the hospital. Both the firefighter and nurse had been educated at my college. Result: an unsolicited, unrestricted seven-figure gift. Telling the story and asking for financial help does get results, sometimes in unexpected ways. I was asking for bond money and got a philanthropic donation. And the bond passed, too!

Assuring Talented and Dedicated Foundation Leadership

In your role as the chief fundraiser, you need a competent foundation executive director. In my experience, six skills are important for this position: 1) passion for fundraising, 2) engaging personality and people skills, 3) existing relationships in the community served by the college, 4) experience in fundraising, 5) knowledge of higher education, and 6) organizational skills. These are in order of importance. You cannot teach passion or personality. Knowledge of and relationships within the community take time but can be developed, as can fundraising experience. However, lack of these at the git-go will affect your timeline for getting to the next level. The ins and outs of higher ed can be picked up with some mentoring, and organizational skills can be learned. One of the challenges of hiring an executive director is that passion and personality are hard to glean from a resume.

My advice is to make the job announcement attractive to a wide range of applicants and then interview many more than is typical — and focus the interview on passion and personality. Finally, do not scrimp on compensation. To get the skills you need, in most cases you will be stealing a person from an existing high functioning organization. Have a salary schedule with several high end steps. You are going to ask this person to grow and advance the foundation to the next level, and the compensation should grow commensurate with the increasing responsibilities of the executive director as the foundation expands.

At one of the colleges I led, I inherited a foundation executive director who was low on three key skills. After getting to know him, it was apparent that the deficit in people skills and in leading the organization stemmed from low self-esteem. This was a guy with talent who had overcome a lot in his life. He wanted in the worst way to get that foundation to the next level. So with his approval, I arranged for a mentor who I knew well and trusted implicitly. This mentoring was arranged between the two of them, without my involvement and without disclosure to others at the college. After a year, the change was noticeable: he was much more confident in dealing with others and thus was able to be properly assertive in leading the foundation organization. But #1, the passion for fundraising, was still at low ebb. So I did my

best to be the source of enthusiasm, energy and passion for our fundraising efforts. And we did get to the next level — and he did continue to grow as an educational professional. Eventually, he expressed interest in serving the college in a broader role, and was selected for a more responsible position in the organization.

The opportunity thus presented itself to select a new foundation executive director with passion, personality and experience — who inherited a well-run organization smoothly transferred from the previous executive director. The point? Those six skills must be available to the foundation through its leaders: executive director, college president and, in some cases, the president of the foundation board.

It is hard to underestimate the importance of the foundation executive director, particularly in the climb to the next level. Transforming an organization is challenging at best and depressing and deflating at worst. As CEO, be prepared to buoy up spirits, assure job security, affirm professionalism, give advice and solve problems.

Getting the College Team on Board

How does the CEO lead the transition of the foundation to the next level? You must have — or must create — a mandate: a call to action, marching orders. Why do you need a mandate? First, getting to the next level takes time, and folks at the college will get impatient, particularly if you did not start with a sense of purpose, passion and power. Getting to the next level takes a minimum of three years.

Second, getting from “scholarships, socials and saccharine” to the next level takes resources. You will need to direct or redirect resources as an investment to produce future returns. Regardless of where we are in the rollercoaster of the economy, it is a challenge to invest money with the hope of future return when present needs are so urgent. Viewing philanthropy as a mandate establishes a basis for investment in building the foundation.

Third, getting to the next level takes cooperation from other units on the campus — willing cooperation. It is *you* who must frame this compelling mandate and bring others along.

You’ll need the blessing of the governing board — your “bosses.” There are four action steps I have found to be useful for engaging the governing board members in the mandate to improve the foundation.

First, philanthropy should be in the CEO’s job description and in the CEO’s annual evaluation. This creates three opportunities for constructive dialog between the CEO and the governing board. Initially upon hiring, the board and college president can discuss the importance of philanthropy and set mutual goals. Each year, in your self-evaluation, you can emphasize not only recent accomplishments in philanthropy but also your mandate — and strategy — for moving the foundation to the next level. Finally, in discussing the governing board’s evaluation of your performance, the dialog can reaffirm the mutual commitment of the board and president to the necessary and often challenging steps required to advance the foundation.

Second, at least one of the governing board members should be on the foundation board of directors. This visibly demonstrates the support of the governing board for the foundation and allows that governing board member to be intimately familiar with the importance of investing in the foundation. This governing board member should be cultivated as an ally for you as CEO, since decisions for staffing, facilities and financial support come before the governing board.

Third, the foundation executive director should make reports to the governing board at its regular meetings. This report should concisely summarize progress on building the

foundation, on contacts and events, and on actual dollar value of donations. Such reports give consistent high visibility to the executive director, signal to college staff and the community the importance of the foundation, and build a strong relationship between the executive director and members of the governing board.

Fourth, ask governing board members to take a personal role in identifying potential donors and perhaps using their relationships to introduce potential donors to the foundation. Invite each governing board member to meet with you and the foundation executive director to discuss how they can establish and meet a “give and get” goal.

At one of the colleges at which I served as president, it was clear in my job interview that the governing board wanted my leadership in philanthropy. Good, I thought. When I stepped on the campus, I discovered that the board – not just one but the whole passel of them – had issues with the current foundation executive director. Investigating, I found that her job description had been approved by the foundation board but not by the board of trustees, that she was not in regular communication with the trustees, and that she had neither cultivated new donors nor maintained contact with existing donors. The board of trustees wanted to directly evaluate her and set donation goals for the foundation.

So I used one of my “honeymoon cards” as a new hire to get the trustees to let me handle the situation. After some investigation to get my facts straight, I met with the executive director and let her know that it was my intention to conduct her overdue evaluation, establish a regular role for her to report at monthly trustee meetings, and review her role with donors and potential donors. I offered my assistance to achieve these outcomes, but left no doubt about the desired outcomes. Within two months she had accepted a job at another foundation. And I had a mandate from the board of trustees to get the foundation to the next level.

It is important that key units on campus be on board with giving direct support to the foundation: marketing and the business office in particular. As CEO you have several roles in making this happen: matchmaker, traffic cop and coach.

Marketing and the foundation have a natural shared mission in promoting the advancement of the college. Remember that advancement is one of the metrics on which the foundation is evaluated. Again, this is a two-way street. Foundation events and outreach should utilize the messaging and branding developed by marketing. Marketing materials and messages should build both the image of the college and celebrate the achievements of the foundation. As matchmaker, you can promote this mutual mission by having marketing and the foundation work as a team when events, materials and messages are produced. As traffic cop, you can assure that projects you review and approve have input from both units. As coach, you can work with the directors of both units to help them identify and value overlapping tasks.

The business office and the foundation must work together as foundation revenue is booked and distributed, and when the college and the foundation are audited. It is important that fiscal processes, forms and approvals are mutually agreed upon between the two units. Particularly important is the handling of money collected at fundraising events.

Transforming college processes that have an extensive history is always a challenge. Add money to the equation and you have a combustible mixture. At one of the colleges I served, the Culture Fair was a long-standing event: music, dancing, costumes, displays of artifacts from around the world, and ethnic food booths selling delectable goodies. The foundation supported the event by soliciting monetary donations for scholarships, by accepting in-kind donations, and by booking the food sales income and paying related bills.

One day we received an audit exception for lack of controls in handling the cash from the food sales. The business office started down the path of concocting rules, forms and

monitoring devices. The groups that ran the Culture Fair lamented the demise of the event from the heavy burden of red tape. In I stepped as the traffic cop. The result: Each food booth group filled out a simple form selecting one of two cash-handling systems. Option 1 was a cash box checked out from and returned to the Bursar's Office. Option 2 was to have patrons buy tickets from the Bursar's Office redeemable for food items. The business office had their cash accountability and the foundation had a nice record of revenues.

In addition to the "partner" units on campus, the foundation must establish productive relationships with other departments and individuals on campus. These partnerships have three potential positive outcomes: blue-ribbon needs lists to promote to potential donors, departmental relationships with alumni and other potential donors, and direct employee giving to the foundation.

A foundation's database should include a donor or prospect's area of giving interest. With this information the foundation can 1) show how high-performing the college happens to be in this area and 2) share needs of the program or service that is of interest to the donor. It is important that the executive director develop relationships with key managers around campus. Assure that the foundation will work with the department to craft the outreach to alumni and business partners in a way that maintains and enhances the existing relationships. By starting with departments that already have a good relationship with the foundation, others can develop confidence in foundation activities. There is no better message than to share how foundation outreach has resulted in direct fiscal support to departments on campus.

It has been my experience that employee giving campaigns are more effective in later stages of foundation growth and development. Employees need confidence that the foundation is worthy of their donations. We see the deep and extensive needs of our students and want to be sure that our precious donations produce results. Three things to keep in mind: leader gifts, recognition and feedback. Employees want to see that trustees and senior management are giving, so recognize them publicly. Employee donors appreciate knowing that their gifts make a difference through such feedback as letters from student recipients or donor plaques prominently displayed.

Establishing a Strategic Timeline

If you want to take your foundation from "scholarships, socials and saccharine" to "advancement, enhancement and endowment," plan on three years for the transition.

Year 1: Inspiration, Information, Reformation

- Start talking.
Develop and deliver a clear, concise inspirational message to share your vision about the future of the foundation. Remember, you are creating a mandate! Tell everyone: trustees, community members, the media, and your college (especially marketing, finance, and IT). You are building energy and creating buy-in for what will come later: The Ask.
- Take stock.
Evaluate what you have, compare with what you need, then develop a plan. Use existing college evaluation, planning and budgeting processes. Don't make the foundation look like it's separate from the college; include the foundation director on your cabinet.
- Hire a great executive director.
Then hire staff with the right skills for your vision.
- Build that great database.

Start with current donors. Pull together everything you know about them. Extract information on alumni from your database(s). Buy software: a donor management system with all the bells and whistles.

- Build relationships with current donors.
Call them. Visit them. Bring them on campus. Use this experience to develop a solid donor care-and-feeding process.
- Restructure the organization.
Not the whole thing yet, just the first step in year 1: policies and processes. Work with your existing foundation board of directors to evaluate and rewrite (as needed) the foundation standards and practices to reflect the new, nimble, responsive organization of your vision. Use this experience as a first step to changing the board, but don't do a wholesale swap-out the first year.

Year 2: Boards, Budgets and Buddies

- Transition the Board.
Begin with directors that "get it." Have them be champions of the "Next Level" foundation. Talk to each director individually about their role: some will step up, some will step out, and some will step aside when their term is up. Recruit new directors of affluence and influence. Don't be shy about "Give and Get." When you get to a critical mass of existing champions and new blood, have the board of directors adopt a formal standard for annual director donations and fundraising. While this is a Year 2 project, be patient as this work may extend into Year 3.
- Build relationships.
Get on the community circuit with your executive director. Send hand-written follow up notes to those with whom you meet. Have your executive director visit campus administrators and faculty: mine them for funding needs; look for campus opportunities for projects to fund. Set up one-on-one meetings for you and the executive director with trustees and mine them for contacts, too. Now is the time to start alumni solicitations for the annual fund. Keep a major prospects list and work the list. Be sure to include the vendors with whom your college does business. Set up a vendor appreciation event to kick this off. Have your staff who work with each vendor be a major part of the event. Market the foundation by creating an advancement strategy with the buy-in and collaboration of your marketing department.
- Cover the operating budget shortfalls.
During the three-year plan, your president's Office has committed to covering foundation operating budget shortfalls. By Year 2 you should be paying from your college budget, at most, the cost of your two foundation managers. Two good reasons to keep these folks on your college payroll: it's a sign of support and faith in their work AND it removes pressure on them to fundraise for their own salaries. The operating budget—the "nut" beyond your two managers—should be covered by 1) no more than two major annual fundraising events, 2) Board of Director "gives" of at least \$2500 each year, 3) Annual Fund donations, and 4) unrestricted donations from the President's Circle or whatever you choose to call "selling" direct access to the president. (More on this later.) See the above comments on "events" to be sure you have two profitable major events and a few smaller break even friend raisers.

Start asking!

Develop a comprehensive solicitation strategy, recognizing that nothing is more effective than a personal request for support – or a personal introduction. This includes asking your board members, and having them ask others. At one of the colleges I served, the director was a widow who owned five successful local companies built by her late husband. She was socially connected and had been the “event guru” of our foundation — and she gave generously herself each year. No one had ever asked her about her connections with others of means in the community. Turns out she was a great stringer who brought in several large pledges and major gifts. She stepped up.

You don't get if you don't ask.

Year 3: MAGIC (**M**ajor Gifts, **A**nnual Fund, **G**ive and Get, **I**nvestment Return, **P**resident's Circle)

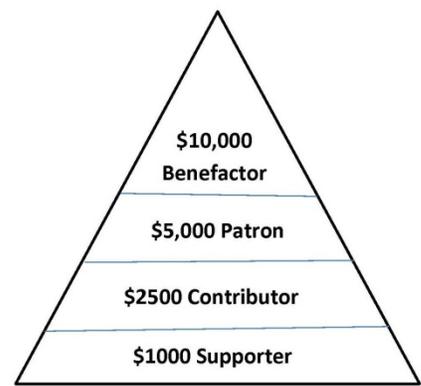
- Build the annual fund, alumni association and employee giving.
By year three you should have significant responses from your annual solicitations. You should have a functioning alumni association. Your annual employee giving campaign is yielding initial good results. Your marketing folks are producing great advancement materials that promote the foundation, IT has your website humming, and finance has your back on budget, revenues, expenditures, audits, taxes, and all that stuff that foundation executive directors hate to do and were not hired to do. You have celebration events for alumni, employee supporters, vendor supporters, scholarship recipients and their donors, and President's Circle major donors.
- Focus on major gifts and pledges
With all the basic stuff humming along, it's time to reach for the brass ring. Work that prospect list to secure major gifts. Remember that you need wealth scores, a stringer connection to the college, and donor proclivities with fundable college projects or naming opportunities to match. Bring together a key group of people to work on major gifts. Define roles.
A typical team for each potential major donor includes the stringer (the individual with the personal or professional connection with the donor), the campus person who can best talk about the project, the tax adviser (who knows how to structure gifts), and the “closer” (the person who will make the ask – typically you or the executive director). Be patient. Major gifts often result from gradual increases in giving over an extended period of time. Be ready with your team, since opportunities can arise at the drop of a hat. Publicize giving opportunities – funded projects and naming opportunities. Don't be shy about including these in your publications and other communications.
- All on board with “Give and Get.”
By the end of year 3 all the board of directors are giving at least \$2,500 each year and getting at least \$2,500 in donations. Your executive director should be meeting regularly with all directors – working especially closely with those who need help with Give and Get. Have the executive director give you a status report on this at least quarterly. Step in and help when necessary. Celebrate that annual achievement of 100 percent Give and Get.
- Create an Investment Policy

Your board of directors should have an investment committee and an investment policy. This policy should be reviewed regularly to adjust the mix of type of investments. Your policy should address reinvestment and expenditures, including protection of the corpus of your endowments.

- Ramp up the President's Circle.

In years 1 and year 2 you may not have sufficient major donors to justify a full President's Circle. You have been giving these folks special attention, but an annual event with three or four participants is anticlimactic. By year 3 you should have a half dozen or so donors at the top two rungs of your President's Circle pyramid. So hold an event where you report on emerging issues in higher education (or some other high-powered topic) and get their input. Remember, access to you is an asset that has value.

- Keep asking! Ask others to give; ask others to help ask. It's worth repeating: You don't get if you don't ask.



The Donor Pyramid

Managing Transitions: Staff, Board, Financials, Data, Training, Outreach

Managing change is a central role of every college president. As the chief Fundraiser, your job is to transition the foundation to the "Next Level." Yes, your executive director is a partner in this reinvention project, but the campus and the community need to see you at the helm. Give personal attention to molding the fundraising staff to your vision, and don't hesitate to make personnel changes.

Changing foundation board directors can be delicate. Find other significant roles for those who are assets to the college but not of means or influence. Appoint them to an advisory committee, get them to help with the alumni association, or have them help with events. And keep in touch with them. Mine your contacts and those of your senior staff and board of trustees for foundation director candidates. Make sure they are of means and influence, and let them know going in of your high standards. Also get their personal commitment to "give and get."

Get your support team on board with supporting the foundation: Marketing, finance and IT. Be direct in facing the challenge of getting these folks to invest their hearts and minds: 1) they won't immediately see the value of this work, so convince them, 2) they are busy with other work so be sure that foundation tasks are prioritized as a part of their regular agenda – and give them permission to say no to other projects, 3) they will need to periodically join foundation staff meetings, so be sure they understand that they can contribute more than just their work products. Be sure to share credit for foundation success with these support units as well.

Emphasize training of foundation staff, foundation board members and support team members. Fundraising is a skill, an advanced profession. Most members of the team do not have philanthropy training in their background.

As college president, provide a clear, consistent message on philanthropy. Look for every opportunity to build fundraising into the fabric of the college.

Here's a story to illustrate: One of my responsibilities is to review and approve architectural plans for new and remodeled buildings. During this process, I look for simple

adjustments that might add value to our advancement agenda. Our new business building design included expanded space for our Hospitality Management and Culinary Arts programs, including a functioning commercial restaurant. It was in a good location with excellent customer access on the bottom floor of the three-building complex. A second floor walkway connected adjacent buildings, forming a breezeway adjacent to the restaurant. With minor modifications, that area became a covered gathering area with a raised platform stage that will function as an expanded outdoor service area when we use the restaurant for college public activities, including philanthropic events. We already have several such locations on campus and use them regularly for VIP gatherings. A similar area, an atrium in our Design Technology Building, annually hosts a scholarship fundraising event put on by our Astronomy Department that raises thousands of dollars—and showcases that wonderful program. Soon we will have a similar location for such events connected to our Business Division.

Patience, Persistence, Advocacy, and Midstream Adjustments

If we expect our work to be predictable, to be filled with serenity, and to receive endless positive feedback, we are in the wrong profession. Foundations are but one more area in which we have influence but not control, insight but not certainty, and satisfaction from incremental gains rather than fundamental transformations. So be patient, be persistent, never flag in your advocacy, and make course corrections as needed. Remember that the gold standard – major gifts likely will not be realized until long after you are gone. But those who follow you will be grateful.

The role you play and the tone you set will make the difference.

To illustrate: One day our foundation director and assistant director stopped by my office. With long faces and downcast expressions they related criticisms they had endured about a recent event that had been a partnership with another unit on campus. “They just want their old way of doing things!” “They think we are trying to take over!” “They won’t let us be partners in planning the event!”

So, as an old classroom teacher, I began the Socratic Method. Were you able to attend the planning meeting? “Well, yes, but we were in the back, not on the agenda, and had to wait to speak.” Were you able to make changes in the program? “Well, yes, but so much more could be done!” Did the event make more money? “Well, yes, but it could make so much more if they had followed our advice!” My responses: So you participated and improved both the program and the outcome. You also gained credibility with the group. You also now understand how they work, and have time to refine your suggestions for the next iteration of the program. Those results alone are incredibly valuable outcomes. Change is slow at times, so recognize your successes.

When leaving my office, the executive director commented, “When I come to your office with seemingly insurmountable barriers, I always leave feeling reaffirmed and hopeful. How do you do that?”

Well, my fellow CEOs, that’s our job, isn’t it?