



Hi, nice to meet you! Will you marry me?

by Julie Mikuska

We talk a lot about the culture of engagement, in our blog and with clients and fundraising professionals in the community. It's really about building and strengthening relationships, within and outside an organization. Like any thriving relationship, it takes time and commitment. It can't be rushed, and it can't be taken for granted.

We see the opposite happening when it comes to the expectations that CEOs and boards have of their development staff. Too often, fundraising is seen to be a quick fix to budgetary woes, and when the desired result is not immediately seen, the blame goes on the development office. It's no wonder, then, that fundraisers leave jobs after 18 months or so. They have been set up to fail.

We need to see greater longevity for development staff. It's in their best interest and that of the organization to commit to each other. Long-serving staff have longer and deeper engagement with donors. They know their organization or institution well. They experience more satisfaction with their role because over time they bring more influence to the organization. They engender trust among donors, staff and board members. And they are leaders in creating a culture of engagement.

In our experience, major gifts may take 10 or more years to come to fruition, so it's worth keeping, cherishing and investing in the right staff.

So what can an organization do to commit to keeping development staff?

- See development as part of a long-term strategy to sustainability and growth.
- Hire someone who is passionate about your mission and help them become a professional fundraiser.
- Empower them to lead.
- Ensure they are a key part of your leadership team.
- Invest in their continuing professional development.
- Break down silos and continuously encourage all staff and board to see themselves as integral to engagement.

Just as you don't usually go from, "Hi, nice to meet you," to "Will you marry me?" in the same day, don't expect development staff to build relationships with donors overnight.

May, 2013.