

Search for a Chief Development Officer (Fund Raiser)

By Bruce Dingman

Doing a fair amount of searches in the world of education and non-profits, we are often asked to undertake a search for a Chief Development Officer. However, the search is so tough to do successfully that we seldom accept such an assignment.

While there are many development professionals available, a large portion of them don't stay long in a position for (most often) one of two reasons: There may be a lack of alignment with the Board and/or CEO and the development professional concerning expectations or approach to fund raising. Or the development person may not be effective. A common reason for ineffectiveness, assuming the person has adequate resources to do the job, is that many don't have the professional self-discipline that makes sales executives successful. They lack a focus on making sales calls, or as fund raising professionals would call it, "friend raising."

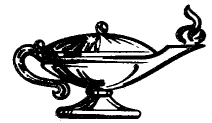
Why are the searches so difficult?

It can be hard to attract an excellent development professional. The person is usually reluctant to leave for one or more of the following reasons: They're in love with their present organization and/or its mission; they have good alignment with their CEO and Board expectations in fund raising; if they leave, they forfeit existing relationships with donors; and they're already well compensated.

So ... why would a good development professional change jobs?

There are several factors that may attract a development professional to a new location:

- For the sake of a promotion or moving to a larger organization. It may include moving fund raising or ministry impact from a regional focus to a national or international focus.
- Higher compensation. As altruistic as one might be, there is still a mortgage payment to consider, so personal income can be a factor.
- A new CEO or Board composition that doesn't understand what to expect from a good development officer. Or perhaps when the development officer sets up the opportunity with a major donor, the new CEO does not feel comfortable doing "the ask."
- For family reasons. The new opportunity may be closer to grandparents or in a warmer climate. Or, if the opportunity is in higher education, there may be tuition assistance for college age kids.



Over the span of 20 years, The Dingman Company has conducted four development officer searches. One person has now been in place for 12 years, another for 10 years and the third moved on after five years when a new CEO came. The fourth search was never completed due to the entrepreneurial CEO/Founder being too busy with other things to find time to interview the candidates, so the candidates lost interest.

What might an organization do to find a development officer on its own?

- Search among donors or friends connected with the organization to find a proven, successful sales professional (coming from some type of relationship-based sales like financial planning, insurance or real estate). Look for someone ready to make a career change and then support that person for six months with a fund raising consultant to train him or her.
- Network within the professional fund raising associations.
- Run an ad in association magazines, job bulletin boards, or the Chronicle of Philanthropy.
- Use a search firm.

What must be present for us to accept a chief development officer search?

We turn down far more requests for development officer searches than we accept. However, we accept searches in which the organization, the mission and the expected results of this position have an attractive opportunity for candidates. Other considerations are the location and the compensation.

There are search firms that do far more development searches than we do. They're likely to have a database of potential development candidates that exceeds our own. However, given the far lower rate of successful completion of development searches, do sufficient due diligence—ask the recruiter about uncompleted searches and talk with his or her prior clients.

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