

*This article is excerpted from David Lansdowne's book, **Fund Raising Realities Every Board Member Must Face**, ©Emerson & Church, Publishers.*

## **The Buck Stops Here**

If there is a first principle in fund raising, it is this: the board of directors has the responsibility for ensuring that the organization's mission is carried out, and of necessity this means finding the resources to do so.

The logic is irrefutable: board members own the organization and are its stewards. If they, who purportedly are the strongest advocates, won't take a lead role in raising money, why should anyone else?

To demonstrate their commitment, board members must first make a generous gift proportionate to their means, and second, agree to devote adequate time and energy to assure success.

This kind of support sends an unmistakable message to prospective donors, namely, that the organization means business.

If members of the board are reluctant to take responsibility, it is probably because 1) they don't understand the importance of assuming the helm in fund raising, and 2) they're afraid they will be required to ask others for money.

In truth, board members will often be required to ask, but in a well-run fund raising program they can participate in other ways too. Some can solicit, others can plan special events, still others can help with researching prospects, or making introductions for others.

Almost always, organizations that raise substantial money have knowledgeable and active trustees. By the same token, causes which scrape by usually have indifferent board members who are unwilling to accept their role.

Lacking a fully-committed board, it will not be difficult to involve others, it will be practically impossible.

## Everyone Dislikes Asking

Rare is the trustee who enjoys fund raising.

If you think it's significantly easier for others to ask for money, you are mistaken. Everyone has the same doubts, fears, and anxieties as you. If it appears easier for others, it is probably because they've faced up to the fact that fund raising is essential to the survival of the organization.

Undoubtedly, you'll recognize some of the excuses below:

- I give my time, that's enough.
- I don't know the right people.
- Fund raising is belittling.
- Raising money is the role of the development staff.
- My work on the board has to do with policy.

Strive to put these and all other excuses aside. Recognize that board members have two basic responsibilities: one is to set policy, the other is to ensure resources. Both are critical, and neither can be skirted.

If the job of raising money is to get done, each trustee must get on with the assignment, and overcome the natural tendency to procrastinate.

A campaign with firm deadlines, tight schedules, reporting sessions, and follow-up phone calls will help, as will workshops, half-day briefings, and accompanying an experienced solicitor on a call.

Perhaps the best salve for anxiety, however, is to keep in mind that you aren't asking for yourself, nor do you have anything to gain financially, nor are you seeking something from others which you yourself have not given.

Your position is unassailable: you are a volunteer working on behalf of a cause that's in the public interest and serves the general good.