

Fundraising Worst-Case Scenario Training

Fundraising Improv Exercise: 10 minutes

Logistical Directions

For this exercise, we will need two teams of six. One team will represent the CEO and the other will represent the organization's largest donor. We will need one volunteer per team to sit in one of the two chairs at the front of the room. The rest of the team should flank the seated member. As the exercise unfolds, any of the standing members may tap the seated member on the shoulder to "tag-in." Don't leave your seated member hanging out to dry! If they stumble or pause, tag-in and take over. Everyone must participate!

Scenario

The CEO. You are a CEO of a struggling nonprofit and you need money. Like, right now. Today. Before noon would be nice. You have been at your job for approximately six months, during which time you have discovered that your predecessor left you in a very unenviable situation. Prior to your arrival, the board had not been given an accurate financial picture of the agency in some time. Donors had not been thanked properly. Grant reports had not been filed. As you sit at your desk today, it occurs to you that you don't remember seeing any tax returns filed for the most recent two years.

As you reach into your desk drawer for the value-sized Mylanta that you picked up during lunch, one of your largest donors knocks on your door.

"Okay if I come in?" she asks.

"Certainly," you reply.

"Good," she responds, "I have some things I need to discuss with you."

Your stomach sinks. This cannot be good, can it? Her file says that she does not want any contact from the nonprofit and she has never shown up unannounced before. In fact, you've only met her on one other occasion, at her request. Your job as CEO is to keep this donor at all possible costs. Losing this donor today would result in immediate layoffs. Plus, psychologically, you really just can't handle one more mark in the loss column.

The Donor. After inheriting some money, you proceeded to make a small fortune on your own, allowing you to give generously to a number of local nonprofit organizations. You typically are a hands-off donor – you feel that your role should be helping to fund the work, but that the specifics of that work should be left to the nonprofit professionals.

However, on this particular day, you feel as though your trust and your investment in this organization have both been abused. As your accountant was preparing your returns, he noted that this nonprofit had yet again not issued you any acknowledgement letters. As you looked through your file on the nonprofit, you saw no annual reports. You went online and noticed that the site had not been updated in over a year. Just then, you seem to remember one of your friends who works at a local foundation mentioning that this organization had not filed reports in some time.

And sure this new CEO might just be the messenger. Or he might have had something to do with the dysfunction of the organization. Either way, sometimes messengers get shot. That's just the way of the world, isn't it?

You enter the CEO's office with the intention of telling him you are through funding his nonprofit. Your heart goes out to the clients, but you just can't take the incompetence any longer. Start with, "I've met another organization – it's not you, it's me" and then start to push harder. **DO NOT LET HIM OFF THE HOOK EASILY.** If something could go wrong in a donor relationship, it has here. Be creative about listing the problems that you've encountered as a donor.