

The 5 Factors to Ensure Your Amazing Success

I'm flying high. I had an opportunity to meet with Larry Ellison on behalf of a client several years ago. Ellison, as you well know, is the founder and genius behind Oracle.

He told me it wasn't always easy for Oracle. He said it still isn't.

During its darkest days, some of the people closest to him doubted the company would rebound and survive. But Ellison's resolve never faltered, never wavered.

I asked him what made the difference. What he told me is a powerful lesson for everyone who raises funds. He said:

"Always have a bold vision.

"Be passionate about what you do.

"Act confident, even when you're not!"

If you have heard me speak, you know that I preach the credo of confidence and positive thinking. Even in this difficult economic environment, men and women give more to organizations they care about. I'll tell you about this a bit later in this piece. But first, let me describe the five factors that secure your organization's future.

1. Mission.

I visited Peter F. Drucker at his home in Claremont, California, a while back. I was writing a book about the importance and responsibilities of serving on a board (**Boardroom Verities**). It was about the passion and commitment directors need to bring to their position.

What was interesting is that Dr. Drucker was writing a book at the same time on the same subject. His became a classic in the nonprofit world. (Mine did not !)

I spent the day with him. He said that in every Board Room where directors meet, he would have a large sign that projected in large letters the mission of the organization. That way, it would be certain every decision made by the board was in confluence (his word) with the mission.

Your mission should drive every decision and activity of your organization. What impresses me particularly in these difficult times is that most organizations are very likely more active and serving more people than ever before.

Your mission has never been in recession.

2. Board of Directors. Whenever I meet with an institution, I ask the staff and the board, “Why isn’t your board the strongest and most influential in the community?” (It often isn’t.)

I ask what organization in the community is more important than yours? More deserving of the most significant leadership in town?

Or if it’s a college, I ask— is your board stronger (influence, affluence, passion) than your peer colleges. If not, why not?

Here’s what I know. You do not elect board members. You select them. Carefully. I have found you are hurt more by those who would have said yes to serving on the board and were not asked, than by those who say no.

The stronger the board of directors, the stronger the organization. You should not settle for anything other than the very best.

There is no standing committee more important for the board’s long-term effectiveness than the group that selects board members. The sad truth is that the prestige, influence, and affluence level of the board does not rise above the level of the most prestigious, influential, and affluent members of this committee. That’s why you select top-level leadership to do the recruiting of new board members.

There are two overriding factors that are vital in building a dynamic and strong board: selecting the right people and then educating them immediately and effectively on their role.

You do not elect people for this job of serving on the board. You pick them.

3. Innovation.

The only constant we have in life is change. You need to continually reinvent yourself. You need to be an incubator of new ideas.

What was good enough yesterday will not be good enough today. What you are doing today will not be good enough for tomorrow. The rate of acceleration is frightening, demanding, and challenging.

When I talk with Dr. Antoine Garibaldi (President of the University of Detroit-Mercy) he tells me, “All I want is to make this University the greatest in America.”

He goes on to say that in order to do that, it will require new and exciting thinking. We'll need to step out of the traditional box. It means vision.

There's another factor that is essential to keep in mind. People give to your organization to create change. No one gives to maintain the **status quo**. Men and women don't want to give money away. They want to give to bold and dazzling programs that are transformative.

4. Planned Giving.

Some organizations I talk with about adding a planned giving person tell me they can't afford the added cost. I tell them raising funds is expensive. But what is truly expensive is NOT raising funds.

I believe that any organization with a budget over \$5 million annually should have a full time Planned Giving Officer. I find, however, if Planned Giving is shared in the portfolio, say with Major Gifts—Planned Giving is neglected like over-ripe cheese.

Where we have added a Planned Giving Officer, I tell my clients to consider not giving them an office. Let them have a table and a phone. I don't want them in the office. They need to be out calling on people.

5. Stewardship.

Most organizations do not do a good job of effectively thanking their donors. Letting them know how important their gift is. And telling them how their gift performed miracles (no matter what size gift).

You should phone every single donor to thank them. And certainly first-time donors, no matter what the amount.

Practice the **BOY** rule. Because Of You. Let your donors know you couldn't have done it without them. "Because of you, we were able . . ."

There's more. During the year, be in contact with your donors to thank them again. And again. And once again.

Consider attrition your enemy. You should be measuring it regularly.

I hardly need tell you how important it is that donors know how valuable their gift is to the organization and how greatly they are appreciated.

There you have it. And here's how easy it is. I'll explain.

I consider these five factors to be essential to the vitality and continued development of your organization. The interesting thing is that not one costs any money— except for the planned giving, where I urge you to add staff.

This is what I suggest. If you feel I provide at least a starting point, review the list with the staff. If I promise you that these magic five ensure the future of your organization's success, it's worth a major segment of a staff meeting.

In the meeting, after your review, make recommendations as to how these factors can be more effectively implemented in your organization. That becomes the basis of a major discussion with your Board.

Remember Larry Ellison's admonition I passed on to you: Have a vision. You are a major player in the most important and effective organization in the country. Have confidence, as Ellison told you. You can make it happen.

— Jerold Panas

