

15 Ways to Transform Your Board of Directors into Fundraising Champions

by [Marc Koenig](#)

Nonprofit boards are notoriously hit-and-miss.

For example, in Jacob Smith and Trey Beck's excellent *The Nimble Nonprofit*, there's a chapter titled: "Your Board of Directors: Good Enough Really is Ok." Not exactly glowing review, by any means.

Effective boards are great for helping to set expectations for the executive director, develop strategy and keep the nonprofit financially grounded.

But *fundraising* is also an important aspect of board membership. If you craft a board of directors to create an intentional culture of fundraising, you not only help out your main fundraising team, but **you create a powerful method of community outreach and sustainable revenue generation.**

The Chronicle of Philanthropy recently hosted a live chat titled [Turn Your Board Members into Fundraisers](#), with Carol Weisman and Larry Levin, two well-versed nonprofit professionals, offering guidance.

We've gleaned 15 of their best points from their presentation. Read them below to learn how to transform your board of directors into fundraising champions.

Enjoy:

15 Ways to Make Make Your Board of Directors into Fundraisers:

1. **Set expectations.** Carol Weisman says: “First and foremost, let people know that you expect them to fundraise BEFORE they join your board.” You can’t expect your board to become fundraising champions if you don’t create a clear expectation of a culture of fundraising.

2. **Communicate how fundraising relates to the mission.** Too often an unhelpful disconnect exists between the perception of fundraising and your mission as a whole. Larry Levin: “Make sure folks who don’t see themselves as fundraisers understand how their tasks play an integral part in development.”

3. **Train your board members.** Have your seasoned fundraisers teach your board the basics of their approach, preferably at a weekend retreat or something equally focused.

4. **Buddy up.** Pair the least comfortable with those most comfortable to help them out. Levin says: “I like pairing experienced fundraisers with no-so-experienced ones to create mentoring and reduce the perceived stigma.”

5. **Fundraising is part of a board’s fiscal responsibility** as much as their other fiscal responsibilities. It’s part of the gig—or should be.

6. **Fundraising is a skill that can be learned.** Don’t discredit folks as not being “fundraising types.” Being a successful fundraiser comes after being trained to be one.

7. **Don’t neglect your introverts.** Quieter board members can actually be some of the best fundraisers, once you’ve communicated the importance of fundraising

to the mission as a whole. Many of the people you're asking for money are introverts too, so strong extraverts and more glib conversationalists will turn them off.

8. You don't need "affluent connections." You just need to be good at connecting with people—or learn how to. Many people with money to contribute to philanthropies don't display the superficial social signals we associate with the wealthy. Carol Weisman recommends reading *The Millionaire Next Door* to hammer in this point. Speaking of which...

9. Read. Here are some recommendations: Marshall Howard's *Let's Have Lunch Together*, Penelope Burk's *Donor-Centered Fundraising*, and David Sternberg's *Fearless Fundraising for Nonprofit Boards*.

10. One fundraiser isn't enough when the competition is fierce. Many institutions have hundreds of individuals manning their fundraising. You're at a disadvantage if board members don't join in.

11. There's more to fundraising than the infamous "ask." Your board can be part of the donor identification process, cultivating potential donors or stewarding existing donors to create donor loyalty. The ask is only *one* part of the process, though important. Speaking of asks...

12. Some people will never be good at asking. Give opportunities for training and learning, and then allow people to decide which part of fundraising is a good fit for them. Why not have ask-deficient board members recruit potential donors to come to events, a much less daunting task?

13. Be aware of your board members' other obligations before inviting them to the board. Many governmental folks and full-time professionals raise

funds for other organizations and may feel free to fundraise with you. Talk about this beforehand.

14. **Be intentional about meeting and calling people.** Don't expect to bump into others or try to stalk them. People appreciate you being genuine and upfront with your intentions—trust us.

15. **Realize the alternatives to fundraising if your board is unwilling to fundraise.** Weisman discusses the alternatives: “[Will you] reduce services? Change the mission? These are complex and difficult questions. One of my clients just closed down one of their facilities thanks to a 75% government cut from the state. Share the pain with your board members.”

Fundraising is important. Create a culture that encourages your board of directors to participate, and allows your mission to grow with your ambitions.