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WHAT MAKES A GOOD FUNDRAISER?

By George Stanois

What does it take to be a good fundraiser? Many qualities are integral to this but a few that come to mind are vigilance, hope and sustainability. By vigilance I mean being keenly watchful, never missing an opportunity that will aid your cause. Hope: the feeling that what is wanted can be had — that no matter what, you believe in your cause and will never stop trying to reach your goal. And by sustainability I mean the ability to keep in existence, prolong and support your organization for the long haul. The stories in this issue remind us of those traits and how we can use them.



What is a vigilant fundraiser?

How can you excel as a fundraiser, strengthening relationships and ultimately raise more money for your nonprofit? The short answer is *by being a vigilant fundraiser*. But what exactly does that mean?

I define a vigilant fundraiser as “someone who takes a strategic approach in the execution of their fundraising program. They understand that resource development is a process and as such is willing to take the time to apply rigor, measurement and structure to develop a fundraising strategy. The truly vigilant fundraiser is one that is consistently on the lookout for opportunities to support an organization’s long-term sustainability.”

“Vigilance means having a keen sense of when to push boundaries or try something new, but always using your strategy’s clear mandate to drive those decisions.”

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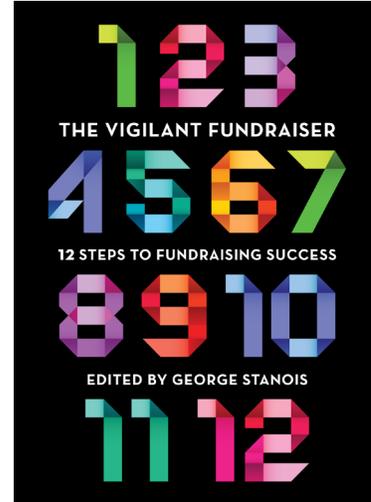
Why be vigilant?

In my book *The Vigilant Fundraiser*, senior fundraisers outline 12 steps for creating an effective fundraising program. What is that thing that sets some charities so far above the rest? It's vigilance. Vigilance is the secret ingredient that will make the steps — all best practice activities — work for your organization.

There are two types of fundraisers out there: ones who work from their office — often closed off from people and outside interactions. Then there is the fundraiser who is truly “out there” being vigilant to opportunities and meeting the people who make magic happen.

“Vigilance starts when you open yourself up to the possibilities of what is happening around you.”

What frustrates me is when I see fundraisers eating lunch at their desks instead of going to the cafeteria and interacting with people around them. A fundraiser's network starts where they live. Vigilance starts when you open yourself up to the possibilities of what is happening around you.



Are you being vigilant? Do you know how to assess whether your plan has been a success?

Tips for being a Vigilant Fundraiser

- Get out from behind your desk
- Push boundaries
- Try something new but only if it's within your mandate to do so
- Steward your donors
- Measure success
- Create benchmarks
- Capitalize on opportunities and invite feedback

The vigilant fundraiser is one that is constantly on the lookout for opportunities to support an organization's long-term sustainability.

The vigilant fundraiser looks for ways to make the most of this experience, learning from the past to plan for the future.

FROM HOPELESS TO CATALYST

Orphaned at a young age in Africa, **David Mensah** grew up in appalling poverty, enduring near starvation and horrific abuse. Abandoned by his mother, he was forced to live with an abusive uncle. David escaped and another uncle, a powerful tribal witch doctor, terrorized him. As a result of his harsh environment, David hardened into a gang leader, who tortured animals and beat people.

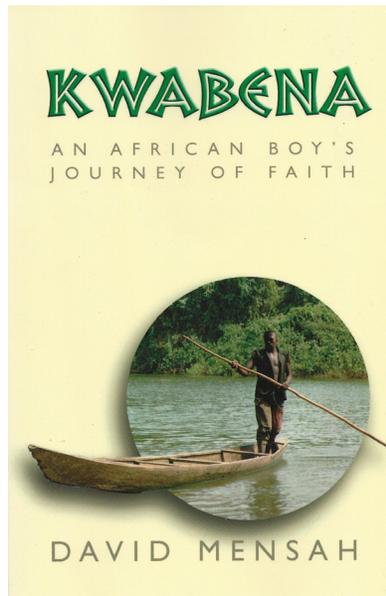
After a chance meeting with a Christian, David himself found Christianity and changed his violent ways. With a small group of friends he founded the Northern Evangelistic Association (NEA) with the mission of sharing the gospel, helping the poor and sending medical help to remote regions.

“This I call hope. It is the kind of hope that is needed today.”

David overcame insurmountable odds to complete his education, and travelled to Canada to attend Ontario Bible College. Despite his grim situation, David used his faith as a source of strength to help him overcome tremendous adversity.

Dr. Mensah earned a PhD from the University of Toronto, later moving back to Ghana with his family to continue the work of NEA.

He has chronicled his inspiring story in *Kwabena: An African Boy's Journey of Faith*.



Today, Dr. Mensah is spearheading a campaign to build a permanent general hospital in Northern Ghana. They must currently rely on annual visits from a visiting medical team as their sole source of medical care.

There are only 17 doctors to service the 2.5 million people. With an infant mortality rate of 38.5 per 100 live births, it is easy to see the impact of a lack of access to health care, education and basic needs like clean water.

After hearing Dr. Mensah's story of **hope**, The Goldie Company was inspired to act as fundraising counsel on the \$10 million dollar campaign. The goal is to provide sustainable health care through a general hospital to service 100,000 people.

Dr. Mensah believes this project can greatly affect change: “The goal of our ministry is to serve people in a holistic manner... We

are upgrading medical services to meet the health needs of the population. Our team works alongside communities to dig wells and provide fresh water... We are helping people to develop new farming techniques that will help them to survive and even prosper. This I call hope. It is this kind of hope that is needed today.”

Dr. Mensah's tale of incredible poverty, abuse and despair embodies his faith, resilience and hope. He truly lives the belief that hope can overcome anything. As fundraisers, community members, leaders or volunteers, isn't hope something we could all use a little more of?

“ Without health people can't work their way out of poverty in a sustainable manner, and without alleviation of poverty they won't be able to sustain good health for the long term.

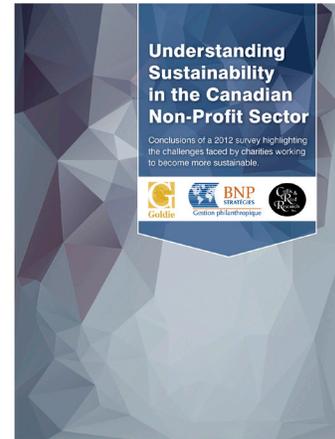
— Dr. David Mensah,
NEA Director

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SUSTAINABILITY: WHAT WILL MAKE OR BREAK YOUR CHARITY

The third trait of a good fundraiser is sustainability, meaning to keep going or provide over the long term. Anyone can be successful at raising funds for a short period, but good fundraisers realize that sustainability is essential. How will your organization help others in the future if it no longer exists? How will you as a fundraiser (and person) keep going if you are unsustainable? (Also known as burnt out!)

For these reasons, **The Goldie Company, BNP Strategies** and **Collis & Reed Research** conducted a survey on how Canadian nonprofits and charitable organizations perceived themselves in terms of their sustainability. The objective was to understand how they defined sustainability (by what criteria?) and to rate themselves on how sustainable they felt their organization was.



Predicting sustainability

Three principles measured in the survey are strong predictors of sustainability:

1. The strategy to cultivate donors for future gifts is having measurable positive results.
2. The organization indicates having a fully integrated fundraising program where annual, special events, major gifts, and planned giving programs effectively work to provide the best possible donor experience.
3. There is a coordinated and active media communications program in place.

Best practices for sustainability

- ✓ Strong Fundraising Plan
- ✓ Donor stewardship (for the purpose of cultivating future donations)
- ✓ Consistent and effective communications program

There were several **common themes for organizations who graded on the low end for sustainability**:

- Underdeveloped plans
- Staff and volunteer competency issues
- Lack of resources to properly implement plans or programs

Understanding Sustainability in the Nonprofit Sector highlighted the challenges faced by charities as they attempt to become more sustainable. The survey included 146 nonprofit and charitable organizations from across Canada.

The survey consisted of 50 questions, with responses to 22 out of 35 questions showing significant differences in sustainability ratings. Interestingly, questions where respondents rated key principles associated with nonprofits received the lowest ratings. For instance, 28 per cent of respondents solidly agreed:

- We have a fully integrated fundraising program where annual, special events, major gifts and planned giving programs effectively work to provide the best possible donor experience.

A majority of questions showed significant differences in ratings, indicating that most of the principles rated in the study are related to sustainability. It also suggests the study met its objective of having participants set and evaluate their own sustainability criteria.

Although it is difficult to agree on what sustainability means, this study does offer a unique perspective, highlighting the challenges for nonprofits as they seek this.

Further details and conclusions may be found in the full report, ***Understanding Sustainability in the Nonprofit Sector***.