

Here is this week's question:

I heard you speak at a conference a few months ago and you gave what you said was your "tough love" speech for board members. It was very good but I'm having trouble relating it to my board, who claim that they don't have to give a donation because they contribute so much time. Where do I go from here?

This seems to be every board's mantra: I give time so I don't have to give money. Is time valuable? Maybe, if it's the right kind of time doing valuable things for the organization. Does it replace a financial gift? No!

I hear this from board members all the time – especially board members who don't do much more than attend a meeting. Meeting attendance is important, of course, but if that's all you do, it's time to move on.

The short answer for your board is this: Board members are the people who are closest to the organization, who are most passionate about the mission and can see first-hand how useful the services are. If these board members are not willing to make a financial investment in the organization, why would a community member, a foundation, or a corporation want to?

Obviously, board members need to understand the organization's expectation for board contributions and that expectation should be clear from the beginning. Sure there are people you need on the board for reasons other than money, and not all boards need to fund raise. But if your organization asks ANYONE for a donation, the board members should be first in line with their checkbooks.

And don't tell me that the board doesn't have any money. EVERYBODY, even people who are unemployed, make some charitable contributions. Whether it is \$2 or \$2 million, board members should be asked to give a gift that *they* would consider generous.

There are two other points board members must understand. Board members must, from time to time, go on solicitation calls or ask others for a contribution. If the board member has made a contribution first, he or she is really asking the prospective donor to join him or her in the support of the organization. It's an easy ask.

But, if the board member has not made a contribution, the ask feels like begging for charity. No one likes to beg. That's why most board members hate soliciting. They're begging, not recruiting.

Third, foundations and corporations want to know that the board is supporting the organization financially. If the board is looking for rescue from the community, the foundation is likely to pass.

Short answer: Board, Fund Thyself!