

# “Help! My Board Won’t Help Raise Revenue”

You need to know the origins of board resistance before you can solve the problem.

By Karen Eber Davis



*“We ask our board to get five people to donate, and they do,” the speaker said.*

*“How do you do that?” came an incredulous cry from the audience.*

Learning that a board helps with fundraising should *not* leave nonprofit leaders incredulous. Healthy boards engage and lead. Healthy boards support income growth.

The support you seek may or may not include “getting five people to donate.” It does involve measurable actions to boost revenue growth. You have many choices about how the board helps. Before you can benefit from board help, however, you must overcome any pushback.

## Why Won’t Your Board Engage? Three Types of Unhealthy Resistance

You’ll often encounter unhealthy pushback when you ask board members to help raise funds. This opposition signals an infection or even multiple ailments. There are three main types of unhealthy resistance:

### 1. Your Design Is Faulty

You may be causing one kind of resistance by exposing your board to poorly designed requests for help. Design refers to the processes you use to engage your board. Faulty design issues include vague instructions, weak cases, poor or no skill-training, one-size-fits-all requests, high-risk-low-return proposals, and too many appeals, to name a few. Fundamentally, you fail to offer opportunities with clear wins for your board members.

### 2. You Encourage the Art of Avoidance

You may be responsible for another type of resistance, one that stems from old habits. Just as repetitive activities develop calluses, opposition frequently bubbles up from old wells.

“Opposition frequently bubbles up from old wells.”

An example will help. At a board meeting, you ask your members to call five people to support your annual appeal. The response? Several people flip open their cell phones. Others thumb through their paperwork. One jumps up, clutching his phone, and runs out of the room. Collectively they “play dead.”

Why do they respond this way? The last seven times they heard similar requests, avoidance worked. They didn’t have to do the task.

You triggered and reinforced a conditioned response. Remember Pavlov’s dogs from your Psych 101 class? In this case, instead of food linked with a bell, you link requests with avoidance behaviors.

To solve this problem, you’ll need to replace people’s habit of avoidance with new habits. Again, the remedy is to find new, exciting opportunities to engage your board members and ignite their energy.

### 3. People Fear the Unknown

Understanding the above resistance issues, you design an incredible opportunity for your board. Still, you experience vigorous pushback. Board members don’t return calls. Appointments get forgotten. Over time, you hear their message: “No.” This resistance stems from damaged thinking. Board members are afraid of operating out of their comfort zone, admitting they don’t know how to fulfill your request, and hearing “no” when they make an “ask.”

It’s because of this fear of the unknown that training is so helpful in cases such as this. Once people have been well trained in how to do something, the fear of doing it dissipates. They discover through good training that there are many ways to help besides making a direct ask. They gain the skills they need to raise money. They learn that fundraising can be fun. They become excited about directing their energy into productive work.

“Are your requests for help poorly designed?”

## Turn Board Resistance into Goal Energy

Does your board resist your request to help obtain revenue? Which of the three reasons lies at the heart of their pushback? Hint: It can be more than one. To eliminate opposition, first understand its origins. Then you can transform that resistance into positive change. 

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Offer your board members engaging opportunities to raise funds. Find tips in these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

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