

# Ten Cage-Rattling Questions to Ask about Your Fundraising Strategy

Are you a fundraiser who's not getting the support you need? Ask these questions to start some productive conversations.

**Q** I'm in charge of fundraising at our small nonprofit. The problem is: I don't receive much support from the organization's CEO or board members. They don't seem to understand what fundraising actually entails. They expect miracles from me yet don't give me the resources or autonomy to perform my job the way I'd like to. Their goals and expectations are unrealistic. They keep asking me to focus on fundraising events, even though I've explained that the time spent on holding such an event more than once a year doesn't justify the small payoff. They just don't seem to listen to me or take my concerns seriously. I don't want to alienate anyone, but I'm at the end of my rope. What can I do?

**A** You're not alone. Plenty of fundraisers can identify with your situation. You're right in suggesting that it may not be appropriate or productive for you to tell off your leaders. You work for them. They choose whether or not to listen to you. Confronting them with the truth isn't likely to help you make headway. You need to frame your position artfully.

So, to help you, here are 10 questions you can (innocently) ask – questions that will gently help your leaders see things from your point of view, along with the main points you need to remember. These questions aren't confrontational. They're strategic and organizational. But they do put serious issues squarely on the table.

You have to ask these questions if you're serious about creating a smart fundraising strategy that everyone can buy in on. And doing so is vital to your organization's future.

Check out these questions and ask some of them – at the right time. They'll open the doors to hugely productive discussions.

## 1. Can we be honest about what's working and what's not working?

Most organizations are pretty set in their ways. Most staff and board members are in their comfort zone and don't want to disturb themselves. Nobody wants to rattle any

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cages. Honesty may not be rewarded. Tough questions about fundraising strategy aren't asked.

**Remember:** *Creating an atmosphere of openness and honesty is essential if you want creativity and new ideas – and mega fundraising success.*

## 2. Can we make decisions based on data and not personal opinions?

How are decisions made at your organization? Do you rely on data and facts? Or do you make decisions based on people's personal preferences or opinions? There's often too much weight given to the opinions of the most powerful person in the room.

**Remember:** *Set your strategy based on data and research. This is a **must** if you want to reach epic fundraising goals.*

## 3. Are we willing to ditch unproductive programs?

Often there are special fundraising programs (especially events) that are no longer worth the time and effort. But they're protected by a powerful board member or the CEO.

Where are the time-wasting, unproductive fundraising programs in your organization? Can you speak honestly and ditch them?

**Remember:** *Don't waste your organization's wildly precious resources of time, energy, and money in places where it doesn't pay off.*

## 4. Are we willing to set \$ goals that are backed up with a plan?

Sometimes fundraising dollar goals are estimated, guessed at, or even pulled out of the air. Some organizations want more out of fundraising but don't want to figure out how to get there. They don't have a plan that will set up success.

**Remember:** *It's impossible to achieve great results without a detailed, calendarized plan and strategy.*

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## 5. What would happen if we invested more in fundraising?

If your organization invested more in fundraising, you would pay back the investment plus realize a significant return. Fundraising isn't a cost center. It generates revenue.

**Remember:** Invest more in fundraising, and you'll see an exponential return.

## 6. Can we encourage risk taking with a fundraising venture fund?

Some organizations set aside funding just for new fundraising ventures that offer promise. If you borrowed from your endowment and invested in expanding fundraising, you'd see a return of 300-400% – plus you'd pay the principal back.

**Remember:** Venture investing in fundraising can be a smart strategy that yields substantial revenue.

## 7. Can our entire organization embrace fundraising as a mission goal?

The nonprofits that integrate fundraising into their core mission goals are the ones who achieve maximum fundraising results. Every single person – from the folks answering the phones to the CEO and the board – needs to commit to fundraising.

**Remember:** You'll see transformational results if everyone in the organization works together on a plan that's 100% supported.

## 8. Can we all embrace and honor donors as important to our mission?

Honoring donors is the first step toward an organizational culture of philanthropy. When an organization does this, then mega fundraising is truly possible.

A true culture of philanthropy exists when everyone embraces donors as important, valued, and worthy of attention and honor. Your leaders may be nervous about the idea of fundraising, but they *can* get excited about your donors.

**Remember:** An organization-wide commitment to your donors will lead to powerful fundraising development.


## 9. Could we set aggressive, breathtaking goals?

Aggressive goals force everyone – from administrative staff to board members – to work differently. Aggressive goals get attention.

**Remember:** You can accomplish unimagined feats if you marshal everyone's energy into a new set of transformational goals.

## 10. What will it take from everyone to make this happen?

When it comes to honoring your donors and building a sustainable base of revenue for your mission, what's everyone's responsibility? What is each person committed to create?

**Remember:** Everyone needs to be on board if you're to make the kind of money that not only funds your work but transforms your organization's potential and reach. Your organization's future depends to a large extent on the decisions you make about fundraising strategy. Remember that transformational results really are possible. You can aspire to incredible heights – and actually reach them. You can't imagine the amazing results that are possible until you give it a try. 

Gail Perry, MBA, CFRE ([gailperry.com](http://gailperry.com)) inspires nonprofits around the world with cutting-edge fundraising strategies and new tools to make fundraising more successful and more fun. Find smart strategies to help you raise tons of money at [Fired-UpFundraising.com](http://Fired-UpFundraising.com).



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