



Should Executive Directors Donate to their Organizations?

In the face of board members' rancor, should executive directors give up their practice of contributing?

Q:

Several colleagues and I share a problem. We are all executive directors of nonprofit organizations. We contribute to our organizations in an amount that is consistent with the average board member. We contribute for several reasons. First, our donations provide our organizations with needed financial support. Second, contributing demonstrates our commitment to our programs. Some reactions of board members, however, are making us question this practice.

While some board members have been appreciative, the reactions of others suggest resentment. Board members seem especially resentful when previous executive directors have not contributed but the current executive director does so. We wonder whether board members feel their generosity is “minimized” by our financial support. The extent that our contributions are unique also raises the possibility that our motivation may be suspect.

Each of us wants to continue our gift giving, but we are concerned that this may not be in our best interests. We would be very grateful for the guidance of “Ask the Experts” and *Nonprofit World* readers. If other readers have encountered this problem or have any ideas, I would appreciate hearing their reactions. Your response will guide my current and future practice. Thank you!

A:

My response is in two parts:

1. No gift should be questioned if the intent of the donor is to advance the nonprofit organization’s mission.

2. Executive directors are an important part of the leadership team. Their gifts are an example to others as well as an expression of support

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for the cause. Leadership has a price—in time, talent, and, quite often, in financial terms.

My suggestion to any employee of a nonprofit is to give, if you believe in the cause. My suggestion to executive direc-

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tors is to give because it is expected that they, as leaders, believe in the cause and will show their support. My suggestion to board members resenting the executive director’s gift is to examine their reasons for being involved in the cause. If they need a reason to explain their own reluctance to give, they will always find one.

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Editor’s Note: We urge readers to send us their responses. What are your donation practices? Have you encountered this type of resentment? If so, how have you handled it? If not, how have you prevented it?