



What Can We Learn from Three Accomplished Leaders?

Wisdom from the Ages, Three Keys to a Better Organization, & a Few Questions for Your Board

By James A. Donovan

Some wisdom is timeless, and some of the best leadership advice is especially meaningful today. Now's a good time to ponder some strategic questions about your organization and hone your management, fundraising, and communication skills with the guidance of three of the best leaders of all time:

1. Peter F. Drucker, in *The Effective Executive*, offered this sage counsel, "It's not important to get things done. It's important to get the right things done."

That advice has never been more relevant. With information bombard-

Ours is the age of the 90-second sound bite.

ing us from all directions, we must separate out what's really important. We must start each day by asking, "What are the strategic tasks I need to address today?"

Another Drucker book, *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*, offers five queries that could set a new orientation for your organization or clarify your current direction. Ask your board members to consider each one to position your organization for the coming years:

- What is our mission?
- Who is our customer?
- What does the customer value?
- What are our results?
- What is our plan?

2. Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman, in *Roots of the Future*, told his life story as a rabbi in World War II, rescuing Jews from Hitler's death camps, transitioning into fundraising for displaced Jews throughout Europe, and creating the United Jewish Appeal in

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America. The chapter "How To Raise Billions" lists the five greatest assets in the fundraiser's arsenal:

- knowledge of the cause you're representing
- a passionate belief in that cause
- strong self-confidence that produces clear articulation
- an easy manner
- an ability to rebound from rejection.

When asked the secret of his success in raising billions throughout his career, Rabbi Friedman replied, "Raising people (first). People raise money and if you develop a cadre of workers, knowledgeable about and dedicated to the cause they espouse, they will do the job successfully."

Ask your board members to consider these five questions to position your organization for the coming years.

3. James A. Baker III, advisor to three U.S. Presidents, was given this advice by his grandfather: Work hard, study, and keep out of politics. That's the title of Baker's book, which he subtitled "Adventures and Lessons from an Unexpected Public Life."

Baker's father also gave him some advice, which he followed more conscientiously than his grandfather's instruction. He calls his father's advice the "five Ps": Prior preparation prevents poor performance.

As he writes about the complex issues he's faced in his life, Baker keeps coming back to the challenge of preparation. It's a lesson that's crucial for us today, especially when it comes to stating the case for fundraising. Ours is the age of the 90-second sound bite. You must get people's attention and keep it. There isn't time for rambling or generalities.

The Short Version

Take time to improve your professional and organizational performance by heeding the counsel of these three accomplished leaders in management, fundraising, and communication. We can boil down their wisdom into three key lessons:

1. Ask the right questions so you focus on the right tasks.
2. Raise people first. Money second.
3. Prepare carefully before making the case for giving to your organization. Then state your case in 90 seconds or less. ■

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