

# Start With Passion, But Don't Stop

Don't miss any part of the formula for sustainability & success.

By Karen Eber Davis

**N**onprofit success draws deeply from the well of human passion. Founders see wrongs to right. Leaders imagine a different world. People follow those with zeal for something better.

Yet, passion, while necessary, is never enough.

Last month another nonprofit shut its doors, leaving in its wake a set of disappointed supporters. Passion fueled its growth; lack of income killed it. Other nonprofits experience blow-ups in the boardroom, some arguing about destination, others about tactics, both fueled by engaged passions. Unharnessed passion stirs actions, but like a Fourth of July firecracker, the actions inspired might sparkle brightly before exploding or fizzling into smoke.

Ingenious nonprofits find ways to harness passion as an energy source. Harnessed, passion creates mission results that amaze and astound. The formula: your passion + my passion directed to effective actions = mission results for the long haul.

How might you fully collect and harness the energy of this ardor? The following outlines a logical, effective framework:

## 1. Know Thyself.

What brings goosebumps to your arms? When do you go beyond the call of duty? To work more effectively with enthusiasm, first create a list of your passions.

Ask: When and why do I care so much that I go beyond what's necessary? Consider experiences that move you as "passion alerts," much like traffic alerts. When you're enthused, infuriated, or stirred by any strong emotion, jot down a few words to capture the essence behind it. Write. It will help you recognize the depth and variety of your passions. For example, you arrive at work miffed at a driver who cut

you off. You take out your list and write down some of the values that mobilize you: respecting others, being mindful, handling a lethal instrument with care.

To apply this to your nonprofit work, focus on the "why" behind your involvement. What story brings tears to your eyes? Or what about the "other" organization — you know, the competitor who "does it wrong" — what key points do they miss?

Recognizing your own zeal helps you draw on your feelings as fuel for your most important work.

Furthermore, shared passions represent ideal connection opportunities. When you know your passions, you're moved to say, "me too!" when others express their own. Shared enthusiasm creates bridges between souls.

## 2. Seek Donors Fueled by Passion.

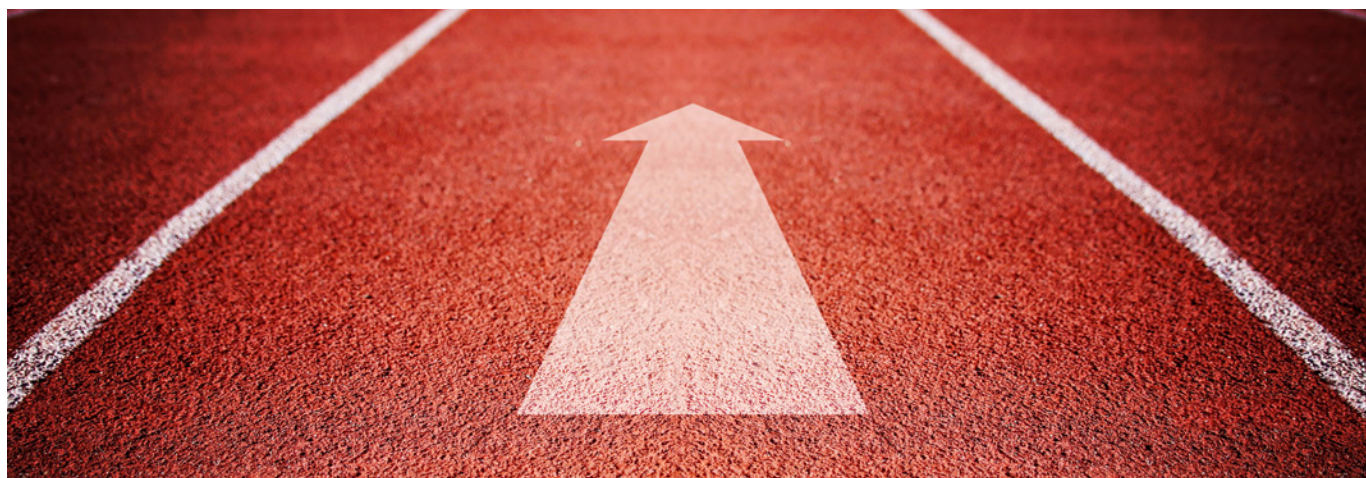
"I love our donors," said Molly Demeulenaere, acting interim director at the Museum of Science and Industry in Tampa, Florida. "Most of them are science geeks — like me." Seeking donors who share your passion represents a vastly different mindset from "getting money." Getting money involves *taking* something into your possession.

No one wants to be taken. Do you?

People want opportunities to act on their commitments. They want to create results. Ingenious nonprofits listen for, learn about, and understand the "why" behind their supporters' commitment to their organizations, so they can develop invitations to help those individuals tap their energy.

## 3. Handle with Care.

Without passion, a nonprofit is unlikely to succeed. Without *harnessed* passion, it runs the risk of blowing up at an



inopportune time. Like gas under pressure, the risk of explosion always exists.

Like bottled gas, treat passion with care. When you tap it, direct it toward mutual goals. When you ask for advice, for example, note that you'll also be asking others for suggestions, so the giver understands their advice will be considered but perhaps not used. When you ask people to donate, make it about their goals. You'd be remiss not to offer the opportunity.


Working successfully with passion requires that you recognize its properties. We're all fervent about *many* things, and our limited energy and resources allow us to act on only a few. People often experience confusion about which actions, if any, will fix, change, or improve things that matter to them. Ingenious nonprofits help to reduce this confusion.

Yes, people who have passion about your mission are more volatile than those who are involved because of peer pressure or obligation. That's the drawback. The benefit? Passion-driven people engage for the long haul and give more.

#### 4. Give People Many Options.

Nonprofit development helps people dive into their passions and use their resources to be effective agents of change. Good development, therefore, offers ongoing and varied invitations to act.

Beyond development work exists community-building work. In this work, ingenious nonprofits invite people who share passions to meet and connect both physically and virtually in small groups. Once you know the passions of people who support your work, create opportunities for them to meet others and enjoy the "me too!" experience.

Join the ranks of ingenious nonprofits. Start with your passions, seek supporters with similar vigor, give them lots of opportunities to act, and invite them to join communities of people with similar passions. 

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### Continue the Journey

For more ways to know yourself, connect heart-to-heart with others, and raise funds in the process, see articles such as these at NonprofitWorld.org:

**Deeper Donor Relationships = Increased Contributions** (Vol. 26, No. 4)

**Do You Want to Change the World? Will People Pay for That?** (Vol. 34, No. 1)

**How to Foster a Positive Funding Relationship** (Vol. 32, No. 4)

**Think, Dream, and Do** (Vol. 28, No. 6)

**Fifty Shades of Fundraising** (Vol. 33, No. 3)

**Is It Time for a Time-Out? Take Stock of Your Life** (Vol. 31, No. 4)

**The Real Secret: Moving Beyond the Law of Attraction** (Vol. 29, No. 4)

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