

Remarks: The Right to Ask for Money
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When I was asked to speak at this luncheon the suggestion was that I talk about the relationship between the associations in education and the educational institutions. The program reports that I will talk about the contributions made by the associations to education. What in fact I will talk about is the central preoccupation of the institutions and the associations and those who are involved in philanthropy -- namely, fund raising:

The important political, economic, and social right to ask for money and to give it.

Back in 1957 when I joined the development program of Washington University as an editor there was a lot of talk about making alumni relations and public relations and fund raising more "professional." At that point the emphasis was not on making individuals in the field "professionals" (although that was considered important, too). The principal emphasis was on raising the level of dignity of the activity itself. Alumni relations had become a kind of fraternity party road show, public relations was an endless flow of superficial press releases, and fund raising wasn't talked about in polite company.

At that time CASE was two organizations, one called the American Alumni Council and the other called the American College Public Relations Association. There was a great deal of conflict between them, primarily related to who was going to control

fund raising, the newcomer euphemistically called “development.” In some places -- Washington University was one -- development won out. Although there were theoretically three functional programs involved, the department itself was called “development” and fund raising was its first priority. Alumni and public relations fought over which would be the second priority.

The “professionalization” process was designed to bring dignity as well as efficiency to fund raising. No one suggested that fund raising be called “fund raising” -- the word “development” was to suggest a higher level of aspiration, above what most people seemed to regard as a grubby and degrading necessity. During the first four years I worked at Washington University I worked on the public relations side. (We called it “university relations” because it, too, needed a little more class.) The other five years I worked in development. Those five years as a development administrator and then seven years elsewhere as a university president gave me some sense of what fund raising is all about. During most of that time I also had the opportunity to be involved in institutional planning, in trying to articulate the goals and purposes of the institutions where I worked.

Most of you have shared in this process in one way or another, and from my present vantage point I can say with some confidence that many of you, even now, appear to be engaged in fund raising.

The received humor in my present line of work is that raising money is a dreary chore and that giving money away is delirious fun.

True.

But the problem I want to talk about is the quandary we face because fund raising has such a bad reputation. We have a system of higher education that depends in significant and often critical ways on voluntary financial support. At the same time we share cultural values that make the process of generating that financial support increasingly difficult.

Ours is a textbook example of cognitive dissonance. We know that we need the voluntary support, yet we don't feel comfortable about asking for it. To resolve the dissonance we have to reach a higher level of understanding of the problem.

There are undoubtedly many reasons that one might give for the ambivalence about raising money. Let me mention a few:

1. The first reason for ambivalence is that everyone would prefer to have been born rich. To be less than independently wealthy is to be dependent on others for economic survival. Ambivalence toward fund raising has its roots in wishful thinking. The deepest reason for our ambivalence toward fund raising is this resentment of the feeling of dependency it sometimes generates.
2. A second aspect of our ambivalent attitude is that raising money is a process of persuasion rather than demonstration. The facts of the case are not sufficient to bring forth the funds. We have to persuade others to act as we want them to.
3. Third, the process of asking for money is thought to be demeaning from one point of view, and manipulative from another. There is some ideal relationship (we seem to think) where self-interest, on either side, is not a factor.
4. Finally, fundraising, when successful, entails gratitude – expression of gratitude, at least, which reinforces the sense of dependency which in turn reinforces feelings of inferiority.

Mature and responsible people don't have these problems, but some of us do. I don't want to argue at all that these are defensible attitudes, or that everyone holds them. What I will argue is that they exist, that they are held by a great many people, and that they undermine and threaten our system of voluntary support.

The history of philanthropy shows a recurrent movement from the voluntary to the involuntary, from gift to tax. Without the voluntary dimension there is only the

involuntary, without the freedom of the gift there is only the coercion of the tax. To possess the right to give money is an important right we take for granted. When we demean fund raising, we jeopardize the individual right to be philanthropic, the right to seek voluntary support for the ideas and activities we believe to be important.

The purpose that inspired some enlightened administrators back in the 1950's -- such as E. H. Hopkins of Washington University, for example -- was that the end of voluntary support deserved means that were not degrading or discomfiting but disinterested and professional. I think Hoppy and his colleagues of those days were on the right track. I'm not at all sure their effort to advance professionalism has been sustained since that time, or that we understand as well as they did how important the effort is.

To suggest the professionalization of fund raising in higher education is to suggest that institutional integrity and honesty are possible. That comes first. If the institution has not internalized its own basic purposes, advancement of those purposes is bound to be in part a sham. When institutional purposes are formulated for development purposes, it means that the marketing department is in charge of design and production. That may work sometimes in selling appliances; it shouldn't work in education.

To speak of the integrity of an institution means that what it is and what it says about itself are congruent. No development office can make that happen. That is a presidential and trustee responsibility, reflecting the quality and standards of the faculty. In higher education, as in life, deception of others almost always follows deception of self. In the short run, self-deception by the president and the trustees is almost always easier than facing the reality of institutional improvement.

The second requisite of professionalizing fund raising is a set of standards. Fund raising is based on persuasion, on interpersonal relations directed toward a conscious goal. It is an ethical quagmire, a Slough of Despond for those who can't

find firm ethical footing underneath. It is a natural field for what is being referred to these days as “applied ethics.” Yet I don't recall ever attending serious workshops at development meetings that were designed to help development staff better understand the ethical aspects of their work. Nor do I recall ever attending a meeting at which the institutional responsibility of the president to know and understand these ethical problems had a prominent place on the agenda. Once again, standards of ethical practice are set by the president and the trustees. Presumably, they know what those standards should be.

My third and last point about professionalization pertains to the fund raising staff themselves. There must be institutional purposes that are based in reality, there must be institutional standards of ethical behavior, and the burden for both of these -- for formulating them and monitoring their implementation -- rests on the president and the trustees. When the president and trustees take the responsibility seriously, they put great emphasis on recruiting people who can fulfill the role effectively. They pay a great deal of attention to personal character, and try to get behind the mask that every job candidate is presumed to wear.

They look for intelligence and solid education. Strong verbal skills are essential, because persuasion is an art of words. But reasoning requires intelligence and interpreting an academic institution also requires a sound liberal education.

The development staff member, once found and recruited, is made a full and worthy part of the institution. The development function is recognized and accepted, the rapport between the development office and the faculty is open and balanced.

The development staff member, finally, wants to do this kind of work. He considers it intellectually respectable as well as difficult and complex, and he can cope with the ethical ambiguities that are part of his life. He is also content with a supporting role.

These things do happen. Some institutions come fairly close to trying to be what they say they are, and some have standards of performance that would bring honor to a law court or to a scientific laboratory. But most institutions seem to take their development program for granted, and measure its performance on “results,” as if the funds were really raised by the fund raisers alone, fund raisers with their tricks and inside knowledge and thick skin.

I worry about the development function, then, however it is organized, because voluntary support is the key to that degree of autonomy that makes the difference between our system and all others. This dreary, demeaning, grubby, scrambling for money, as we so often think and talk about it, may be the last piece that solves the puzzle that is our free and enviable collection of colleges and universities. It is the one most important interest all of us here today have in common.

It can't be left to fund raisers, public relations officers, or alumni directors. It can't be left to CASE. The entire institution and the entire educational system depend on the integrity of development, or advancement, or even fund raising -- if we can dare to call it that.