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## Book Review of The Generosity Network: New Transformational Tools for Successful Fund-Raising

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## The Generosity Network: New Transformational Tools for Successful Fund-Raising

Jennifer McCrea and Jeffrey C. Walker, with Karl Weber, 2013. 304 pages. Carlsbad, CA: Deepak Chopra Books.  
[ISBN: 978-0-7704-3779-4]

At the Johnson Center for Philanthropy, we talk about fundraising to a lot of boards for small and mid-size nonprofits. When we share information about the role of the board in fund development, we tell them that it is good use of a board member's time and that there is no violence involved: no hitting up, no shaking down, no arm twisting. We reassure them that no one is asking a board member to abuse a personal relationship, and that if it doesn't feel good, you're not doing it right. This is meant to be joyful work. We tell board members that fund development is a team activity and even the most brilliant development director or executive director can't do this work alone.<sup>1</sup>

By this time, board members are usually becoming excited and want to learn more about the "ask." We like this. We want board members to be excited and to rehearse and to be ready for the "ask," but we try to slow down and talk about the essential journey of relationship building. Thus, what a pleasure it is to be able to recommend *The Generosity Network: New Transformational Tools for Successful Fund-Raising*, by Jennifer McCrea and Jeffrey C. Walker with Karl Weber. A fun and easy read for any volunteer or staffer being asked to help with fund development, it puts the emphasis exactly where it should be: You can do this; it's a process; it will be a team effort; and it's going to be transformational for you and the donor. The "ask" will come in due course. The book's promise to the reader: "Not only will you be able to raise more money than ever before, you'll also

succeed in attracting more resources of every kind – including time, talent, connections, and institutional support."

Jennifer McCrea and Jeff Walker have shared wonderful anecdotes throughout. Early on, Jennifer McCrea presents her most convincing bonafides: "She has...made some six thousand face-to-face visits with prospective partners on behalf of organizations large and small." We know these visits must have resulted in millions of dollars for worthy causes. But the authors also emphasize that it's "not about the money." It's about values alignment and passion for mission.

The coaching starts with a "know thyself" approach, helping readers identify their own hang-ups about money and deciding how to work through those before reaching out to potential donors. The authors use a lovely analogy to describe successful fundraisers: the jazz band. Not everyone is going to be doing the same thing, but everyone has a role to play in fund development. It's all about being open-minded and courageous while bringing humor, curiosity, daring, persistence, and humility to the work.

Throughout, the book highlights the skills and qualities necessary for success and the barriers to that success. It identifies head-on four obstacles to connecting with donors: a scarcity model of thinking when it comes to money, a sense that the problems we're trying to address are too overwhelming, the fear of the unknown, and the fear of rejection. The authors emphasize

<sup>1</sup> For proof of this fact, we point to Compasspoint's recent study, <http://www.compasspoint.org/underdeveloped>

“why story matters” and how to tell your story in a compelling way, as well as the importance of articulating and motivating through values. They also introduce a new idea to fundraising, using an “avatar” as a means to connect deeply to a donor base that may be global: “The secret of the avatar can allow people to relate to global nonprofits as never before. By bringing the realities of work in a distant land vividly to life in a partner’s den or living room, the avatar uses technology to make the world a smaller place.”

The chapter “Building the Band: Creating Community Around a Cause” properly emphasizes deep listening, with advice like “trade dependency for partnership” and “turn attachment to commitment.” In a section called “The Care and Feeding of the Band,” the authors emphasize the importance of building, supporting, and nurturing the members of the fund-development team – both staff and volunteers. The book discusses what motivates donors to connect to mission and give, and how to build relationships necessary for such a connection.

There is a great chapter on building and re-energizing the board for fund development, and the authors have also done a nice job of repackaging the house party, transforming a captive audience shakedown to a “Jeffersonian Dinner” – a well-orchestrated event that spreads knowledge and interest in your organization (and helps like-minded people network) while leaving the “ask” for another time.

If you are a foundation working to inspire grantees to pursue sustainable fundraising, this book is a useful tool in preparing a nonprofit new to relationship-based fund development. Even a seasoned shop will get a shot of energy from *The Generosity Network* and its reinforcement of best practice in relationship-based fund development. And board members will enjoy this fun and accessible approach. Kudos to the authors.

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