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Remarks, delivered for National Philanthropy Day on November 15, 2002

Arend D. Lubbers
Grand Valley State University

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NATIONAL PHILANTHROPY DAY

NOVEMBER 15, 2002

“IT NEVER ENDS”

One of my vivid memories as a fundraiser dates back to a beautiful spring afternoon in 1962. I had been President of Central College in Pella, Iowa, for less than two years. The campus was separated from the town square, so common to small towns stretching from Ohio to Nebraska, by four city blocks. The square was an attractive park with a fountain and a large stage for civic events. Three of the four streets on the perimeter of the square provided a home for shops, banks and offices. On the fourth was a large, white house of small mansion proportions built in the late 1840s by the leader of a colony of Hollanders that fled the Netherlands to worship as they pleased and till the rich Iowa soil. Settled among the Dutch were a few Americans who established a Baptist Church and Pella became the home of a Baptist affiliated college, Central College, in 1853, looked upon favorably and supported by the Dutch Calvinist preacher-leader of his own Reformed Church, H. P. Scholte, who gave the land for the college.

On that 1962 afternoon two families lived in the Scholte house on the north side of the square, the great granddaughter of the founder and her

family, and Henry and Queen Snow Cox. Henry and Queen had been permitted to make a beautiful apartment using about 40% of the house when they retired from a distinguished career with the Omaha Public Schools in the early 1940s. Henry came from an old Pella family of the American Baptist line. In 1943 he started Boy Scout Troop 373 with headquarters in the Baptist Church and I and a preponderance of Reformed Church boys joined. My father's eleven-year tenure as Central's President accounts for my living in Pella in 1943, and might suggest to you that Central had passed from the Baptists to the Reformed Church. It did in an amiable transition in 1916. Henry and Queen had no daughters or sons and thus showered attention and support on the youth of the town and the students and activities of the college. Henry was an accomplished violinist who had been in charge of all music for the Omaha schools, and who upon retirement taught privately and at the college. Over more than two decades there had been a meeting of their lives and the lives of the college and community.

At about 4:00 pm on that sunny mid-week afternoon in 1962, I walked across the park, crossed the street to the post office, and began the four-block walk to my office at Central College. I had come from a visit with Henry and Queen, and I was carrying with me nearly \$200,000 of stock certificates dedicated to the Cox-Snow Music Center, a dream that was

about to become a reality. As I walked past the post office, a feeling of unbounded elation consumed me. I had never had in my possession anything that matched the value of those stocks. I had never experienced a high like the one I was feeling. Whether right or wrong, it was a feeling of total fulfillment.

We fundraisers are a peculiar breed. We take more pleasure adding to the income of the institution that employs us than to our own income. We really do. If we don't, we are not likely to find the most happiness that is available to us in our profession.

I have described aspects of the Coxes gift because there are four of them, all contributing conditions to the gift. First is the place, a place like no other, that was home for Henry and Queen. Their lives at the college, the Baptist Church, with people in the community were intertwined. They loved the town's heritage and were a part of it. They personified it. They, of course, were aware of this. Some people are unaware of how deeply attached they are to the place ~~or even places~~ where a cause or institution rooted in ~~those~~ **THE** place, needs support. Our job is to ~~share~~ **SHED** a light of recognition so they can see who they are and enrich themselves and the cause by coming together.

Second, the need of the college coincided with their love and profession – music. For all fundraisers, the challenge is to find the point of common interest. Often they are obvious; sometimes they require a search.

Third, their involvement with the college and their understanding of education were so comprehensive that they understood to a high degree the advantages to be gained by students and faculty from new and improved music facilities and equipment. Our responsibility is to educate the potential donor to the benefits that will derive to people from a contribution. For me, this task was easy with Henry and Queen. Contributing to the easiness was their interest in young people that sprang from their teaching commitment and the desire to do all they could to develop good character in the youth of the town and college.

Fourth, there was a bond of trust and friendship between us seeded in their relationship with my parents and Uncle Henry's mentoring me as a Boy Scout in 1943. (The boys called him Uncle Henry.) When I returned to Pella in 1959 as Vice President of the College, the nature of our relationship was different, adult to adult not child to adult, but the quality of it wasn't...genuine affection for one another. When they parted with their schoolteacher's fortune, Henry mentioned to me and in public that trust between us made the gift possible.

The fundraiser, whether seeking large gifts from individuals known to her or him or working massive campaigns, is dependent on relationships for success. Trust and respect cement those relationships. You, like me, I am sure, have found that relationships necessary to your professional achievement can grow into personal friendships. We are now on potentially dangerous ground. Will a friendship be sustained if a person knows that his friend's professional life depends on raising money and some of it from him? It is possible because a reasonable person understands that fundraisers must raise money. I followed the rule that no asks were discussed or made except by appointment with the agenda known beforehand. The late Dick Lacks, who became a friend later in life, liked to say when I entered a room, "Here comes Lubbers. Hold on to your wallets." He knew I would not take it except by appointment, and, I think partly because of that, we had a rousing good time together on many occasions.

Each of us, through personality and inclination, develops relationships, professional and personal, in distinctive ways. There may be as many nuances in relationship building as there are individuals. If you become more successful in eliciting philanthropy as your career progresses, it will probably be as a result of relationships nurtured as well as valuable

professional skills acquired. There is no doubt in my mind that the first large gift I solicited was forthcoming because Henry Cox and I liked each other.

Not long after Henry and Queen's gift I received a letter with a \$30.00 check enclosed, and questions about the college and about me. There was a hint that the writer felt neglected. He was an alumnus who lived in Beverly Hills, California. The postmark induced me to immediately check the alumni files, and indeed there was circumstantial evidence that he had not received the attention that was his due from the alumni office of any institution he may have attended. His name was Frank Brower, born in Amsterdam and emigrated as a boy to Sheldon, Iowa.

With an important California constituency, I visited the state about twice a year and made a point to meet Frank on my next visit. We spent an entire afternoon in his Oceanside cabana, mostly talking philosophy, for he was an author of several books on subjects philosophical and theological. I learned also that he had spent years after World War II extracting a family fortune from the Netherlands. At that time a formidable task. From then on I was invited to stay with the Browsers when in southern California, enjoying, house, gardens, pool, cuisine, maid service, and parties with their friends scattered about Beverly Hills and greater Los Angeles. I was confirmed in

my belief that college Presidents were destined to spend a considerable amount of time with people whose net worth would never resemble theirs.

There is much about my adventures with Frank. We became close friends, to the degree that his widow invited me to give the eulogy at his funeral, even after I had left Central to become President of Grand Valley. I provide this rather long introduction to Frank to make one point. Usually we dined in one of the area's glittering restaurants, but once in awhile the maid-cook was asked to serve us in the family dining room. On such an occasion one evening we discussed the art in the room. Our attention focused on a beautiful, mid-sized Reubens. I had never dined with a Reubens painting. I was impressed. Frank told me ^{HE} had written a letter to the Director of the distinguished Los Angeles Museum of Art offering to contribute the Reubens to the Museum's collection. He had never received a reply. Understandably, he told me in a tone revealing a justifiable pique. Knowing the painting's location was not sacrosanct, I suggested that he give the Reubens to his alma mater. I told him with assumed certainty, that there was no Reubens in Iowa, and that such a gift would make a much larger artistic splash in Iowa than in the Los Angeles Museum of Art. So many well known institutions deign to allow individuals to enhance their own prestige by accepting their gifts, and if this was not his intent, he could enhance his

alma mater's prestige by making the gift to it. He did, along with a Fragnoard, a Jan Van Dyck, an Albert Cuyp, and a few other paintings I don't recall after long years. The Reubens was appraised at \$250,000 and all the rest at another \$250,000. In today's market I would guess they might bring nearly a million. My point, of course, is that solicitors of gifts for worthy causes should watch and listen to donors who have something to give when those to whom they are inclined to contribute have not paid them heed or heed enough. At Grand Valley we felt in the early years that we were closer to the bottom of the gift feeding chain than the top, and took considerable nourishment and satisfaction when we came upon the neglected gift. Beware, however, of the complaining potential donor who would give if only the potential recipient would meet some conditions. New conditions are added as old ones are met or disappear.

From 1972 to 1975 I served on a commission of the Federal Government to study our national foreign policy. To inform myself, I made a swing through Europe visiting our embassies and the departments of foreign affairs of some European governments. In France I sat in the Quai d'Orsay office of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the professional counterpart to the political minister. I don't remember his name, but I remember an important part of our conversation. He was analyzing the

forces and elements that shaped United States Foreign Policy. He paused and said, “Everything you are is influenced by your philanthropy.” His observation was much like his fellow countryman, Alexis de Tocqueville, nearly two centuries earlier. “No other nation in the world,” he said, “generates national life through private giving as you do. That is your genius and moral strength.” He was also saying that it all translates into power. I had never thought of our causes, our nonprofit institutions, our agencies in that way. I gave and I asked people to give. I knew that good things happen through philanthropy. I had not realized until then, however, how much it distinguished us from others. Our philanthropy gives us moral force throughout the world.

We who make our living influencing and asking people to give money, property, or time to make life better in our society, have a formidable challenge. Generally people acquire. Many earn their self-esteem and security by successfully building their own financial empires and providing for their families. We have to persuade them to a better way, a way beyond earning and keeping, to earning and giving. We are assisted by the American tradition, and we are the “foot soldiers” in sustaining that tradition. As you plod through the daily work of preparing materials, building lists, contacting the media, holding conferences, setting up

appointments, analyzing potentials, mailing brochures, and asking for gifts, think occasionally about Alexis de Tocqueville and the French diplomat I quoted. Realize that you are engaged in nation building, carrying on a tradition that will be found only in a great democracy, and is necessary to its continuing strength.

There are many opportunities for discouragement in our profession, even if we know how important we are to the health and power of our nation. People disappoint us by not agreeing to our objectives for them. I have had, over the years, to prepare my mind and emotions so when the disappointments come they do not cripple my spirit. Without a degree of emotional toughening, pursuing a career in the frontlines of philanthropy can become too stressful. If one can manage the “downs,” the “ups” are exhilarating (that is, walking with Henry and Queen Coxes stock certificates back to my office). After all, generosity, gratitude, excitement, caring, building and success are a greater portion of our lives than they are in the workplace occupied by most. We then are engulfed by enabling and interesting qualities of life in our work that leads us to a high degree of personal fulfillment.

A few days ago I was in discussion with a colleague-client. At one point she exclaimed, “When I made the presentation I became an actress.” I

have been thinking about her statement. There should be something theatrical about what we do and the way we do it. Good theatre deals with the playwrights, the actresses, and actors views of truth. It attempts to present the concept in all its complexities and in a compelling and entertaining manner. There is usually a sense of excitement and, at the very least, high interest in attending the theatre. The actors and actresses prepare in depth. They give credence to the roles they play. They are on stage presenting. Behind the production are producers, directors, writers, makeup artists, publicists, maintenance people, costume designers, and stagehands. Theatre appears to me an allegory for philanthropy. We are engaged in a great drama about a variety of truths. We learn our roles and try to give credence to them. We create excitement and interest as best we can so that we can capture the minds, hearts and enthusiasm of our audience. My colleague got it right. There is a difference though between what we do and a Broadway production. Our play never ends.