

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED IN FUNDRAISING

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Robert Frost and Scott Peck both used the image of a road to denote alternatives and choices in life. It is a picture well worth a thousand words when it comes to raising funds. Approaches, techniques and programs abound. Books on marketing fill the store shelves. College courses on grant writing are some of the hottest on campuses. But as with most things in life, the choice is really pretty simple: There is God's way or man's way. Within those two choices are "details" that may be similar in terminology, but diametrically opposed in meaning. Definition is therefore crucial.

In considering the two roads that lie before us in fundraising, this issue of definition is absolutely critical. So let's look at the roads - at the principles, the motivations, actions and outcomes that define them. Like Mr. Frost and Mr. Peck, we just might find that the less traveled way often yields the best rewards.

Underlying Principles

Principle #1: God owns it all

One group looks at fundraising in a very pragmatic, horizontal way. "People control the resources we need to fund our program. Therefore, we need to find those people so we can access those funds." Simple. Direct. To the point. These are the pragmatic doers who make things happen, whether God might want them to or not. Theirs is the road that "guarantees" programs and techniques, promising "X" returns for "Y" efforts. But the principle underlying the approach is the giveaway that this road is a dead end. People are the source of the funds. People are the secret to obtaining the funds.

The principle underlying the other road is so very different. This is the acknowledgment that God owns it all. It is the recognition that we don't own any of what we call "our" resources. It is all His.

In the context of fundraising, I Chronicles 29 depicts the fundamental concept. David expresses this principle, beginning in verse 10: *"Thine, O Lord, is everything that is in the heavens and the earth... Both riches and honor come from Thee, and it lies in Thy hand to make it great."* Further on he prays, *"O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build Thee a house for Thy holy name, it is from Thy hand, and all is Thine."*

Certainly David understood that God is the source. If God owns it all, spending God's money is a spiritual decision. Whether we spend one penny on a piece of bubble gum or \$30,000 on a sports car, we are trustees, if you will, of God's money. Therefore we should be well aware of how He wants that money spent. This fact can be difficult for many people. Most of us would feel capable, with very little guidance, of making a one-cent spending decision. But we should remember John 15:5, which reminds us that *"...apart from Me, you can do nothing."*

Principle #2: God is the fund raiser

There is a second principle that distinguishes the two roads, again by the agents involved. On the wide road, the world's road, the burden for raising the funds is on us. On the road less traveled, God is the fund raiser. This principle is vital to understanding our role. Misunderstand it, and we can greatly misdirect the biblical precedent for raising money.

We see this clearly marked out for us in I Chronicles 29:9; Exodus 35:2 1; and II Corinthians 8 and 9 (esp. 9:7). I Chronicles 29:9 tells us, *"The people rejoiced ... for they made their offering to the Lord with a whole heart."* Exodus 35:21 says, *"And everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the Lord's contribution....."*. And 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, *"Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart....."*.

Notice that the response of the people in each instance is a heart response. A need was shared and hearts were stirred and spirits moved, resulting in giving. Only one person can perform such a feat: God Himself. Proverbs 2 1:1 says, *"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes."* In other words, God is the fund raiser.

So then, what is our job? To find that answer we need to notice what preceded these events of generous giving:

I Chronicles 29:9 - David presented the need in obedience to God's issuing of the vision in I Chronicles 28:6.

Exodus 35:21 - Moses presented the need based upon God's command from Mt. Sinai in Exodus 34:32.

II Corinthians 8 and 9 - Paul presented the need (as seen in chapter 8) and even received the liberty to "follow up" (chapter 9) based on his calling as an apostle in Romans 1: 1 and stated many other places.

Our job is to present the need. We understand this responsibility clearly in witnessing. We are told that our job is to be ambassadors for Christ. We are to deliver the message of the King. As we plant the seed of the gospel, God reveals the truth of His Word. Oswald Chambers wrote, "We are not commissioned to save souls, but to disciple them." When Simon Peter confessed Jesus as *"...the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"* Jesus said to him, *"...flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."* God makes Himself known to unsaved men as believers faithfully deliver His message.

The same is true in fundraising. We are simply called to present the need and allow God to reveal to each donor his or her financial participation. This is an extremely liberating concept from the messenger's standpoint. As we are led to present the need, we need not worry about the results, since they do not depend upon us. "Rejection" does not exist. We should keep our eyes squarely focused on the role of giving the message or presenting the need.

Walking along this road less traveled is only possible because of a tremendous assurance in Scripture: God's provision. Philippians 4:19 tells us, *"My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* If a legitimate (God-initiated) ministry exists, then God has already provided for its financial need. We are not required to "create" funding or to convince others that they "need" to participate financially. God has already appropriated the funding; our job is to share the need and allow God to identify those to whom He has given the resources.

Internal Motivations

Of necessity, theology plays a major role in discerning underlying principles. What we believe about God determines everything about how we live our lives. And recognizing the underlying principles helps to clearly identify the choices before us. Now is where definition becomes so crucial. The signposts, the terminology we use in describing what we do in fundraising are the same on both roads, but the meanings and the motivations they reveal are far different. For example:

Research

This is an essential first step in securing funds, but it is an area understood by few. On the "wide" road, research involves identifying those people with potential to give to your need. On the "narrow" road, research is the function of identifying those prospects "touched" by the ministry or school. Perhaps the term "touched" needs a bit more explanation at this point.

We are looking for those who have resources and to whom God has previously given or is beginning to give a heart feeling for the ministry or school. Obviously this sphere of influence extends well outside the confines of the immediate school family - to the students' extended families, to the Christian community, to the community at large.

Again, most researchers pay heavy attention to a prospect's potential: What are the prospect's financial resources? Are they liquid or tied up? What is the prospect's organizational position? Does he or she run the company, own it, hold stock in it? What are the compensations of the prospect?

Unfortunately, when we put such an emphasis on this side of research, it neglects the spiritual side of how the money will be used or directed. We must complement research with the personal "probability" of the prospect. How has God "touched" them to participate financially? What is the probability that they are convicted to participate financially and to what degree?

Cultivation

This is another term we're sure to recognize. Understanding this term is critical to setting us apart from the world. For those on the popular road, cultivation is an often cynical means to an end. For those on the road less traveled, cultivation is synonymous with ministry and it must be administered unconditionally.

There should be a "bottom line" mentality here, but not in the usual sense of "bottom line." God gives us the opportunities to cultivate and minister (Galatians 6: 10), and we must respond with no strings attached. Whether or not individuals respond with a donation, we must determine to minister to them as God would have us do.

Let's review the job description as God has revealed it to this point. Based on the foundational principles of (1) "God owns it all" and (2) "God is the fundraiser," we should evaluate the ministry to which we are called. All God-initiated ministries have their needs met by God's provision. This means that the money intended for the ministry is already allocated. One of our jobs is to identify or research its location and magnitude. As we go about this process, God will show us opportunities in which to minister. We must choose at this point to dedicate ourselves to minister unconditionally – apart from the money. During that process, we should be pointing every prospect back to an understanding and acceptance of the first two principles. This should properly motivate each prospect to seek God's direction for his or her financial participation.

External Actions

The three classic fundraising steps also look different on the two roads. We have all had experience on the wide road in this. But here is how a traveler on the narrow road operates.

Step 1: Solicitation

God urges us and gives us the liberty to solicit those who have been touched by the ministry. Only the Holy Spirit can recognize the proper timing; but we must obediently carry out our duties as ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador, of course, is someone who represents another and speaks for that person's views, not his or her own.

We cannot cross the line between cultivation and solicitation without God's permission; but once the Lord has led us to cross that line, our responsibility is straightforward. We should give the message, or present the need. Direct the prospect back to the foundational principles. Exhort them to consider the truth of these principles and to ask God to make them a vital part of their lifestyle. We must be motivated to minister to their spiritual condition, believing that their financial participation is a decision strictly between them and God.

Step 2: Follow-up

This is a concept that demands a proper perspective and an unswaying dedication to serve. We minister by putting the spiritual welfare of others first. It's not that we are seeking benefits for ourselves or even the success of our program, but that we are helping others lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). In fundraising, we must understand that only as a donor obeys God in the stewardship of His money will that donor lay up treasures in heaven. Paul told Timothy to instruct the wealthy to be rich in good works (I Timothy 6:18). Our ministry is stimulating those good works that are ordered by God Himself (Ephesians 2: 10) for the purpose of storing up treasures (I Timothy 6:19).

Step 3: Accountability

Accountability is best phrased by Paul's own words: *"Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account"* (Philippians 4:17). Yes, we ask for a gift; but our greater purpose is for the donor's accountability to God. When all Christians stand before the judgment seat of Christ (I Corinthians 3; 2 Corinthians 5: 10), our works will be tested to see of what they are made. Paul wrote that they will be revealed by fire as either gold, silver and precious stones, or wood, hay and stubble. So we can assume that those works performed by donations not directed by God will "burn." Was the work good and noble? Certainly (Romans 8:28). But if the work was not in specific obedience to God, the donor will "suffer loss," or loss of reward. We must understand this truth in order to properly minister toward the higher good of what may be credited to the donor's heavenly account.

Predictable Outcomes

And where do the two roads lead? It's not hard to predict the terminating points. The real question is why people would ever begin down the one, once its underlying principles and motivations have been revealed. The answer can only expose our very human tendency to operate apart from faith, particularly in the area of finances. But if we truly believe that God owns all the money and has it properly allocated and placed for distribution as He wills, that "road less traveled" suddenly does not seem so lonely or forbidding at all. There it is that we truly become His ambassadors, His partners, His instruments in accomplishing His will on earth. So hear this, Mr. Frost and Mr. Peck. We've found a road worth traveling ... and there's nothing "less about it!"

THE "WIDE" ROAD

The road *usually* traveled

We decide what to do and ask God to bless it (maybe)

THE "NARROW" ROAD

The road *less* traveled

We ask God what to do and then do it

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

People have the resources
We are the fund raisers

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

God owns it all
God is the fund raiser

INTERNAL MOTIVATIONS

Research – look for those with
potential to give
Cultivation – build the relationships
so they will give

INTERNAL MOTIVATIONS

Research – look for those 'touched'
by your ministry
Cultivation – build the relationships
so you can give to them

EXTERNAL ACTIONS

Solicitation – technique-intensive;
hype the need

Follow-up – pressure and persuade
to meet the goal

Accountability – to the program,
to the people running it

EXTERNAL ACTIONS

Solicitation – information/vision
intensive, simply present
the need

Follow-up – encourage to help
donor lay up treasure in
heaven

Accountability – to God alone

PREDICTABLE OUTCOMES

Success/failure depends on us
Burnout

PREDICTABLE OUTCOMES

Success/failure according to God's will
God's provision