Development is dysfunctional …

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Abstract:

Purpose:

This paper aims to assist and offer workarounds for dysfunctional situations in library development situations.

Design/methodology/approach:

Uses practical solutions gained from experience to avoid or deal with dysfunctional situations.

Findings:

Development, by its very nature, is anything but straight forward. For a number of reasons, development efforts can get off track.

Originality/value:

Suggests practical strategies for minimizing dysfunctional elements in library development efforts.

Keywords: Fundraising | Libraries | Design and development | Employee exchanges | Philanthropy

Article:

"Our _____ (library, development office, foundation, etc.) is dysfunctional" – I just returned from a meeting where the word dysfunctional was almost the mantra of all those present. "Teaming leads to screaming" and all other clichés, rhyming phrases, and horror stories aside – the reality is that library development is dysfunctional.

Because library development relies on people, it is not neat, orderly, or even sensible. Development directors and/or library directors might expect a certain donor prospect to make an investment soon, and then said donor may fall into the abyss of "a-gift-ask-is-coming-so-I-won't-answer-my-phone-or-email-for-six weeks". There could be a perfectly logical explanation, but sometimes it just happens. Another scenario is how staff management works on the development

side – another environment that might not be neat, orderly, or even sensible. Whether management is centralized, decentralized, or a hybrid model, all of these structures have a human element, so by their very nature they are at least somewhat dysfunctional.

Once we can move past that reality of a dysfunctional work family, the true work can begin. If we accept this dysfunction as a given or a constant, library development professionals can concentrate on the real issues: raising more money, attracting new donors, and aligning priorities with funding streams. But how do I accomplish those goals, when _____ (fill in your favorite dysfunctional situation) exists within my library?

First, acknowledge that a problem exists: "My board doesn't understand major gift fundraising." "The UL (university librarian) won't go on calls." "The central development office doesn't think the library is a viable funding opportunity." Without a doubt, there are many issues; it is crucial to turn these liabilities into opportunities.

Next, figure out what can be done to minimize the impact of dysfunction. It could be as simple as creating a plan and working that plan – as well as recognizing that the outcomes may not be instantaneous. For example, if central development does not view the library as a viable funding opportunity, break it down by areas – technology, teaching and learning, and collections. Market the library internally by e-mails, handouts, or even in-house presentations. Library priorities may need to be broken into bite-sized pieces to be accomplished. The same could be said for working with the UL – instead of seeking two or more days a month, break it into development hours and bring the donors to him or her.

Further, seek the buy-in of key stakeholders. Development is not an activity that can function in a vacuum, nor does it work as a solo performance. If the board does not understand major gift fund-raising, try to reach out one member at a time; create an education program and work on bringing new board members who understand the new vision.

Additionally, concentrate on, and attempt to capitalize on, other opportunities. Think about: "Is there a work around for this problem?" In the one example: can monies be successfully raised for a library without UL participation? The short answer is yes; the detailed answer involves the standard "w" (who, what, where, why, and how) questions for creating a successful development program without a UL conducting fund-raising calls. Also, it may be possible to use the board chair or development VP in that capacity. Basically, instead of concentrating on what is not present, concentrate on using the tools that are at your disposal.

Finally, do not get discouraged or alarmed. This current dysfunction will likely change. Along with dysfunction, another constant in library development – or institutional advancement – is change –and sometimes rapid change.

Each dysfunctional scenario has variations but the same overall template can be applied: recognize the dysfunction, minimize its impact, seek stakeholder buy-in, concentrate on other opportunities, and do not get discouraged. Keep the overall goal in mind: a stronger, more vibrant library infused with private funds.