

---

## Releasing the Leader Within

**Shari Lynn Scales**

September, 2009

© 2009 On The Cusp Publishing

This is copyrighted material. All rights are reserved.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons copyright that allows the copying, distribution, and display of this material if credit is given to the authors. This license is classified as an Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.



ON THE CUSP  
PUBLISHING

P.O. Box 510257  
Milwaukee, WI 53203  
(800) 805-7086  
[www.OnTheCuspPublishing.com](http://www.OnTheCuspPublishing.com)



a tear or two, and with a quivering voice, deliver the best or worst of news to the flocks who follow them. Leadership speaks to the freedom to express thought, emotion, passion, and persistence—and to help define and even release in others those same powers that each may carry within.

So what does this have to do with raising money in what is, today, one of the worst economic storms our country has ever weathered? Back to the Obama campaign. At a time and during a campaign when it seemed most odds were against a gangly African-American freshman senator, election night proved many wrong as the political ticker showed more than a seven-million-vote lead over his opponent, and as 240,000 people filled Grant Park to congratulate his achievement—their achievement. He had the power to instill ownership among his supporters in this campaign. When leadership is shared, excellence is released.

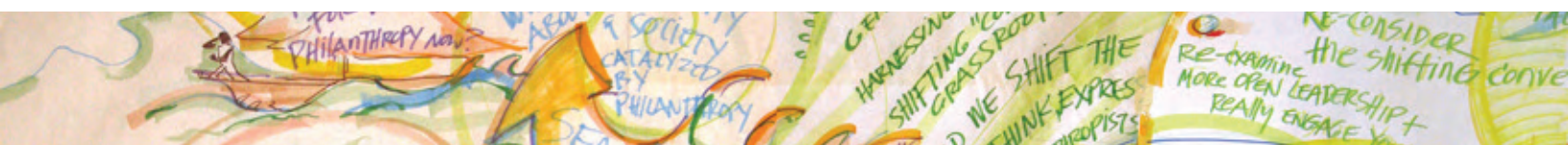
Thus it is critical for nonprofit leaders first to get their organizational houses in order. Not the files, not the database systems, but the people. Whether a 2-person shop or an advancement team of 15, defining how each staff member embraces the organizational mission and understands implicitly the critical role he or she plays in the fund development process is imperative. One-on-one discussions foster opportunities to identify strengths and areas of growth, and to create game plans for movement forward, or onto another team altogether. Creating an environment that instills trust and accountability among the internal staff can only strengthen this idea of unity for a common cause. Leadership is not always about championing popular ideas, rather we need to demonstrate to our development staffs the willingness to be open, take risks, push the envelope, and ask the hard questions—all for the sake of our institutions' and our communities' success.

What about the board? We're taught as fundraising leaders to go out and recruit the best and the brightest community leaders out there. But once they're "in"—then what? I've seen a roomful of financial leaders, successful business owners, retired educational leaders, and real estate moguls reduced to head-nodding robots in board meetings, assumingly, for fear they are out of their comfort zones of expertise. Leadership knows no language. With our boards, we have incredible opportunities to speak in commonplace terms about everyday issues. Does my child or grandchild have a good school to go to? Will our local hospital be able to keep its doors open? Will the university add a much-needed program? What are we to do about the homeless, drug abuse, and domestic violence permeating our cities? Who do we know that can join us in understanding this cause, embracing our mission, and solving these problems? Without necessarily tactical measures and a detailed master plan for solving these crises, one can at least foster the idea of stepping up to dialogue and get our arms around owning the problems, which can then spark leadership in beginning to create the solutions. That's what Barack Obama has taught me anyway.

Leaders can express fear and courage at the same time, serving up doses of honesty along with stick-to-it-tiveness, in the face of incredible odds.

Leaders can express fear and courage at the same time, serving up doses of honesty along with stick-to-it-tiveness in the face of incredible odds. An old friend whom I met in the grocery store the other day talked excitedly about Phil and Penny Knight's unprecedented \$100 million donation to Oregon Health Science University. You see, she has an incurable form of lymphoma that she has been battling nearly five years now. When I mentioned that she looked great, Penny said, "The chemo is working. I'm in 90 percent remission now." But her eyes only lit up when talking about the possibilities the Knight's gift would bring to her oncologist and the team of specialists working with her and other cancer patients, and how their gift will benefit the legislation she is championing at the state level in support of cancer research—all this while juggling a family of her own and teaching business classes at Portland State University. Wow! She inspired me to do more right there on the spot. She made me feel that if she could have that much drive despite not feeling like dancing a jig some mornings when she struggles out of bed, how much more could I do and be? More than I am now, I am confident of that.

So how can we have these same conversations with our major donors? Easy. Get them to share their stories and their passions, and then talk about our organizations and the challenges and opportunities we face collectively. Surely there's a major donor on your list right now who has an idea, but is not sure where to take it; who has a passion, but doesn't have the right forum in which to share it; who has drive to learn





We're human bridges, really. That safe place between what is and what is yet to be. The beginning to an end of a yearning for something better, different, more.

And what does it mean to be president–elect? Or vice president of advancement–elect? We're human bridges, really. That safe place between what is and what is yet to be. The beginning to an end of a yearning for something better, different, more. You saw it in the eyes of the audiences who, month after month leading up to November 4, 2008, filled stadiums and parks, wide-eyed with enthusiasm toward a would-be president whose leadership brought hope when he hadn't even held the title of "president" yet. So, too, a somewhat successful, but could-do-more development team at an up-and-coming Christian university looks to their next advancement VP for direction *now*. A sense of calmness permeates as they wait and rest, for this new person now carries the burden of the future, although not officially yet. It's almost more burdensome to carry the "elect" term than to officially be tagged "it." There are expectations to meet in the interim, two or more hats to wear for a while, confidences to gain that are yours for the losing if you don't act before you're really supposed to. You're the bridge.

So too, we look to our donors to be that bridge—carrying our institutions from one project to the next. Sometimes, merely a footbridge with two ropes tied tightly at either end; at other times, the Golden Gate of a capital campaign goal exceeded. Sometimes we need only skip easily upon a six-lane concrete structure. Other times, we're grasping the unsteady railings, white-knuckled, as our toes curl and grip with every awkward step across the deepest ravines and raging rivers we sometimes find our institutions hovering over. Leadership is about building the bridge and crossing it simultaneously—with your teams and your donors—showing those around you that, yes, anything is possible once passion, and excellence, are released.

The futures of two institutions—a cutting-edge, Christian-heritage-rich liberal arts university on the brink of new success and a 225-year-young country long hoped to be the world leader that would bring all peoples and all nations to common worldly good, no matter their spiritual or ethnic core—depend on us.



## About this extract

In Spring 2009, Gary Hubbell Consulting convened a think tank of North American nonprofit organization and development leaders. Four topics were selected for discussion, each of which became the focus of an insightful essay by each of the hand-picked attendees. The four topics are: New Perspectives on Leadership, Reimagining the Future of Philanthropy, Development in a Systems Context, and Demonstrating and Communicating Philanthropy's Impact. The resulting e-book, *In Search of New Meaning: Philanthropy, Community and Society*, is available for free download at [www.OnTheCuspPublishing.com](http://www.OnTheCuspPublishing.com). This essay is an extract from that publication.

## Also Available from On The Cusp Publishing

### Books

**Forces of Change:** The Coming Challenges in Hospital Philanthropy

**Lessons from Benchmarking:** Fast-Forwarding the Maturity of the Fundraising Operation

**Staff-Led Feasibility:** How to Design and Conduct Your Own Fundraising Feasibility Study

### e-books and articles

**Building Alliances to Enhance Philanthropy**

**Demographics, Generational Change, and Their Impact on Philanthropy**

**Donor Relations 2.0: Building Lasting Bonds**

**Fostering Relationships, Trust, Communication, and Competition within a System**

**Highest and Best Use of Charitable Gifts**

**In Search of New Meaning:** Philanthropy, Community and Society

**Keystone Questions**

**Paradoxical Leadership: A Contrary Take on Executive Clout**

**Releasing the Leader Within**

**Shape-Shifting in Philanthropy: 2009-2015**

**The Paradox of Letting Go and Other Lessons**

**The Prophecy of Millennial Philanthropy**

**They Don't Need Us Anymore**

**What is a Relationship After All?**

**When the Party's Over:** Why, How and When to Conduct a Post-Campaign Assessment



ON THE CUSP  
PUBLISHING

P.O. Box 510257  
Milwaukee, WI 53203  
(800) 805-7086

[www.OnTheCuspPublishing.com](http://www.OnTheCuspPublishing.com)