



Balance Beats Burnout

By Michael Kroth, Ph.D.

If you are like many development professionals and nonprofit executives, at times you find your life is increasingly out of kilter. The Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) 2006 Outstanding Fundraising Professional is no exception. However, Stanley Weinstein, ACFRE, president of Stanley Weinstein & Co. in Albuquerque, N.M., has achieved balance in his life and offers the following advice:

Focus on priorities. Rather than focusing on “time management,” fundraising professionals should learn their art well and then put systems and routines in place to give them the needed time to invest in people, Weinstein says. The key to success is the professional’s ability to meet face-to-face with people who can help the organization achieve its mission. Only then can the development staff and nonprofit leaders foster the relationships needed for success.

“Developing a strong case for support, identifying and researching prospects, scheduling relationship-nurturing gatherings, enhancing the information system, providing effective volunteer and staff cultivation and solicitation orientation, getting out of the office to meet key prospects and implementing a comprehensive resource development program all take time,” Weinstein points out. “But most of these crucial activities are intensely time-consuming only when first put in place. After that, the development operation can run like a well-oiled fundraising machine.”

Surround yourself with strong people. Perhaps the biggest mistake some nonprofit leaders make is failing to attract and retain strong people. (See the article on how to recruit good people on page 61.) Weinstein emphasizes that no one should equate nonprofit leadership with a poverty mentality. It is possible to attract, nurture and develop strong staff and board members! The rewards possible in the nonprofit world often appeal to people at the deepest levels. While nonprofits should strive to provide as generous and appropriate compensation and benefits for their staffs as possible, even when resources are scarce, leaders should seek out strong, competent and principled people.

“When you surround yourself with strong people, your ability to delegate increases,” he says. “This doesn’t mean that strong managers shouldn’t invest in improving systems and procedures that perpetuate best practices. They should. And every effective leader must learn to inspect what he or she expects. Give your best people lots of latitude to do their work, but meet frequently enough to know that projects are staying on track.”

Recognize critical moments and key times. First contacts with affluent supporters, planning and quiet phases of a capital campaign, important gatherings of stakeholders and numerous critical meetings should be elevated as times for heightened preparation and devotion. Maintaining balance means that the effective individual is tuned in to these key times. Often, long hours are unavoidable. The effective professional is always “on” at these critical moments. Still, the thoughtful nonprofit leader does not become a long-term workaholic. During the key times, one might forego the longer vacation but still find time for a three-day break. Or, one might schedule physical and spiritual activities for very early mornings, evenings or well-planned weekends.

Use humor. Fundraising is serious business. In an environment where competition for philanthropic resources is fierce and passionate, people might have differing views about how to move forward, tensions mount.

Do not neglect fitness. “I was an overweight couch potato for the first 59 years of my life,” Weinstein admits. “Then I lost weight and discovered how much I loved bicycling. Now I travel more than 2,500 miles a year with friends on modest to long-distance bicycle road trips. The mistake many fitness gurus make is telling people that they ‘should exercise.’ My advice is to encourage everyone to find the physical activity that he or she enjoys. Exercise should not be a chore. Rather, it should be a source of pleasure and fun.”

Renew the spirit. Simple quiet time can be the best medicine to fight burnout. Great literature, great music and great theater also can be a part of one’s spiritual renewal. Time devoted to these cathartic activities also constitutes an important investment in one’s profession, Weinstein points out.

“There is a double payoff. The arts form a basis for spiritual renewal,” he says. “And it is also true that donors and community leaders enjoy the company of well-rounded people. Every development professional should invest in a liberal education in the truest sense. The more interests the professional has, the greater the probability of bonding with a wider range of people.

“When the work needs to be done, it needs to be done. Just also be sure to use your time effectively for renewal. Work smart. Play hard.”

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