

Seven Lessons My Father Taught Me about Fundraising
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I was born 11 months into John Kennedy's presidency in a blue-collar city just south of Boston. My father pastored a church that's still there today. A few miles from the church was the parsonage. This was where those characteristics of good and godly development were modeled to me, though I had no idea then.

Although the technical skills of fundraising, like feasibility studies and crafting a charitable remainder trust, were outside of my father's orb of comprehension, he taught me seven lessons that have helped me grow in the ministry of development.

1. My father wrote letters. I return to them again and again, his chronicles of affection to me. I have two hemorrhaging hanging folders with more than one hundred letters he wrote me over the years. He taught me the art of expressing appreciation through a handcrafted letter. I still write them.

Not long ago I was in a donor's home where one of my letters was framed and hung on his wall. I was reminded again that the discipline of writing letters, a fading art, is worth the investment. And so I keep a stack of notecards by my desk to write donors on real paper—not cyber paper—with my favorite pen. The length is not as important as the tone and the gesture. My father taught me that to write a letter is to build someone up and to nurture their trust in you.

2. My father modeled the gift of caring. My father visited the sick because it was something he wanted to do, not because it was part of his professional responsibility. People trusted him because he cared about them with no strings attached, no ulterior motives. It was a care for people born out of knowing and loving God. As a young preacher his mantra from Scriptures was "they who know their God will be strong and do great exploits."

This virtue is harder for me, but I try to assume a pastor's care for those in the community of supporters to our university. I pay attention to information about changes in their life or troubling seasons. I make a point to defer talking about a gift if the conversation indicates they simply need to be affirmed and loved.

3. My father recognized people's spirit over their status. My father was not overwhelmed by status. The people he admired and talked about were not the ones with the lofty titles and the notable net worth. He retold the story of the elderly woman he overheard praying in a dark prayer room for each of her Sunday school students, by name. So impacted by her prayer, he told me, "Ever since that day over fifty years ago, I knew that when I reach heaven, I will recognize that voice. I will finally see her face. And I will thank her."

This lesson has occasionally pricked my conscience. In my work I am tempted to judge people based on their profession or their homes or their vocational accomplishments. This is as much a disservice to them as it is an affront to God.

4. My father prayed for the miraculous. As a young boy, I would stand outside his study in our home, cup my hand against the door, and listen to him pray. He prayed with confidence and for the impossible. This small-statured preacher prayed without a hint of timidity. I knew he believed to the depths of his

heart and in the breadth of his life that God was able to do abundantly more. Invariably, God showed up.

Both at Gordon-Conwell Seminary and at Biola University, I have seen the miraculous unfold in response to the faithful praying of God's people. As we called our community to prayer for a stalled building campaign last spring, we witnessed the faithfulness of God through \$6.2 million in giving during a 40-day period of prayer and fasting. No one can take credit for that.

5. My father had an eternal perspective. With his cancerous blood count rising as the medications to stall its growth were rendered ineffective, my father called me. "Whose blood should I be concerned about?" he asked me as I blinked hard. "The blood of Jesus Christ should be my only concern." Even in the face of death, to which he succumbed not long thereafter, he had a view of God that was not limited by temporal realities.

For each of us, our development work is Kingdom work and our Kingdom work is eternal work. I find myself, no doubt through the lessons of my father, reminding our supporters that their investments will bear fruit through eternity. When the legal landscape and the economic forecasts seem like brewing storm clouds, I can zoom back and know that my work in resource development has a forecast that will outlast these temporal realities.

6. My father embodied an abiding zeal. "May the zeal for your house consume me," my father would often say, quoting Scripture. My father was zealous in his calling, which is much different than enthusiastic. He never mistook enthusiasm for zeal. My father wasn't a Pollyanna, so I didn't equate his zeal with a relentless, naïve optimism.

As it is with everyone in development, we face plenty of rejections. Long cultivated gifts vaporize at the last minute and well-written letters yield little. First of all, enthusiasm can't carry you through rejection. Zeal is deep, and it can. Second, people see through enthusiasm as shallow and slick. Your zeal for what you believe in is like an enticing aroma that does not fade. Be zealous in your development work. Enthusiastic, not so much.

7. My father prayed for favor, not favors. On a grave marker in Peabody, Massachusetts, beneath my father's name is the verse Matthew 10:40. "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me." My father would remind me, "In everything I do I must make myself receivable to the people God places in my life. For if I do, they will see Christ in me." My father believed that favor was a gift from God we need to cherish.

A prayer and a virtue we as Christians do not pay enough attention to is to become people of favor, to be found with favor in the eyes of others, to be received as we make ourselves receivable. The word "favor" is a first cousin of "grace." And favor comes from those who believe you. You speak without spin. You listen without distraction. You live out the convictions you talk about. You assure your investors, big or small, that your organization will be stewarded as you said it would.