



DEVELOPMENT GUILD/DDI

COUNSEL TO NONPROFIT LEADERS

How to Help the President¹ Hire You as the Next Chief Advancement Officer By William M. Weber 2008

Not surprisingly, college presidents (and non profit CEOs) admit to agonizing over the hiring of the Chief Advancement Officer (CAO). Perhaps one of the smartest things you can do to ready yourself for the interview is to widen your *angle of vision* ... to see the position through the lens of the President.

To understand what's behind the hire, consider the many issues that factor into the President's decision. Chief among them are:

- The Chief Advancement Officer will have direct access to -- and daily influence on -- the bosses' bosses (i.e. trustees). In the worst case, the President fears that a renegade CAO could be as dangerous as a land mine.
- The stakes are high. Choosing the right advancement officer can insure the success or failure of the President's vision and agenda.
- Unfortunately, advancement often has a bad rap when it comes to loyalty (or more directly, lack thereof) and/or "compensation opportunism." (If you don't believe me, just ask an experienced HR officer).
- The President may be accustomed to a "corporate model" where all key functions are delegated and the staff is held accountable -- overall, a good model. But if the President's corporate instinct is to delegate their own "ask" to their VP, you can expect the President will be confused when you push back...
- If you are successful, your bond with the President will be strong. You could spend a lot of time together (i.e. stuck in the airport). Consequently, the President must feel that they "like" the VP.

A Chief Advancement Officer can help the President make a wise decision by directly addressing the issues cited above:

- **Loyalty:** Give examples of how you earned your previous bosses' trust and respect.
- **Effectiveness:** Provide quantifiable evidence of your success. Most likely, by the time you meet the President, it has already been vetted that you have a track record of success.
- **Retention:** Anticipate that you will be asked why you left previous positions and why you are considering this new opportunity. Never ever "put down" your previous employer or the institution.
- **Corporate Model:** Provide examples of how you expect to partner with the President. Use flexible guidelines that ensure "the best person asks."
- **Chemistry:** Above all, be yourself. Show your interest by asking relevant and thoughtful questions that will help you decide if you want the job. Don't let them hire someone you are *not*. After all, you might become the new Vice President of Advancement!

Bill Weber is President of Development Guild/DDI (www.developmentguild.com).
Dr. Weber can be reached at wweber@developmentguild.com

¹ Please note that I refer to the CEO as the College President because the overall idea can translate outside of higher education to other nonprofit sectors.