

Leap of Faith

During the last 18 months there has been greater scrutiny on fundraising recruitment at every level. With budgets tight, there has been an emphasis on recruiting “tried and tested”, however some charities have taken what might be considered to be a leap of faith and recruited candidates (particularly in corporate fundraising) directly from the commercial sector with successful results.

The charity Bliss did exactly this when they recruited Maggie Allen to develop their charity of the year fundraising programme in October 2009. Maggie’s experience lies in sales and marketing within publishing. As the recruiting manager, Caley Eldred first gives her perspective:

Caley Eldred, Head of Fundraising & Marketing, Bliss

Recruiting staff from other sectors is something usually associated with larger charities. As Head of Fundraising for a relatively small charity, were you always open to recruiting a commercial sector candidate?

Yes we were. This was originally a one year contract and we needed to ensure that we could broaden our search to attract the best possible candidate. We have recruited candidates from the commercial sector before at Bliss, particularly for roles in our partnerships team. I also have experience of doing this at other charities I have worked for and have found it very positive.

In your experience, what are the issues associated with recruiting someone from a different sector?

They bring excellent disciplines and fresh perspectives. There is a lot to learn and you do need to adapt to the different values, objectives and processes of the Third Sector. For most candidates these are some of the most attractive reasons for changing sectors, that along with the fact that they are working for a much more worthwhile end result.

What attributes can commercial sector candidates bring to corporate fundraising?

Strong sales experience and tenacity especially when it comes to getting on the phone and making cold approaches. They also understand the business environment and can add their perspective when considering what a client’s potential needs might be. Being fresh to the sector, they also present with real passion and conviction and are excited about the real change they can make. These are certainly things that we spotted in Maggie at interview.

Would you look at other areas of fundraising as being open to commercial sector transfers?

It is possible in some areas such as special events or direct marketing. However, often sector experience is required to understand the different motivations for donors engaging with a charity. I would never rule it out although I would tend to consider people with experience above those without.



Maggie Allen, Corporate Partnerships Officer, Bliss

What made you want to work in the not-for-profit sector?

I wanted to become part of a solution - to feel like my work could make a positive contribution to society. Working in the private sector sometimes felt like I was sleeping with the enemy! One can be buttered up for a certain period of time by salaries, plush offices and bonuses; after a while that tends to wear off. I was keen to work in a more positive environment and wanted to get a sense of purpose back into my career. I was a trustee for Metro Centre, a £2.75 million income charity, so was already interested in further developing my career within a charitable organisation. Moving over to the Third Sector has enabled me to feel like I’m working to help organisations and society in a positive way - I can’t place a value on that!

How did you identify corporate fundraising as the area you wanted to move into?

Having previously worked in new business development, I wanted to continue using my skill set, so it had a good fit for me. Corporate fundraising is also incredibly diverse. There are so many different factors that need to be taken into account, and so many different ways of developing corporate partnerships, that I knew corporate fundraising would keep me on my toes. I also think, in today’s economic climate, people with B2B experience can add value and perhaps provide a different perspective when developing corporate partnerships.

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How did your preconceptions of fundraising and the not-for-profit sector compare with reality?

I think a common preconception concerning the charity sector is that it's rife with people sporting beards and sandals! Also, lengthy decision-making processes and a less structured working environment spring to mind. However, in reality, I have found the sector to be well organised, with a good sense of business acumen, and a strong sense of team spirit.

How different or similar have you found working methods in the two sectors to be?

I think that on the whole business working methods are fairly similar, but with stark departures in two main areas – the charity sector is far more ethical and egalitarian. The same fiscal drive and pressures are there, with budgets having to be adhered to, and ambitious targets having to be exceeded, rather than just met. However, there is a sense of fairness and there are some ethical and moral issues that take precedence over sheer drive for income generation. I think there is also commonality in the ways that business is struck - much business is won over expensive dinners in posh restaurants in the private sector and guess what... the charity sector also tends to use expensive dinners, but at posh fundraising events. Some things just don't change!

What advice would you give to applicants wanting to make a similar move?

Go for it! Be dedicated - you have to want to make the move actively, not passively. Build your CV by getting involved with a not-for-profit organisation in a position that can highlight your strong business and strategic skills in order to demonstrate that you not only have knowledge of the Third Sector, but are also actively committed to it. Spend time researching organisations and, in particular, how their corporate partnership teams operate. If you feel that you are lacking knowledge in certain areas, find ways of gaining skills and knowledge through courses, volunteering and reading. Finally, be tenacious. Corporate fundraising is about being driven, persistent and focused. It may take a while to find your first position, but it really will be worth it.

State of the Market

- More vacancies advertised this year than in 2009.
- Corporate fundraising roles consistently make up the majority of vacancies registered over the last 5 years.
- Even in the current climate, there are skill shortages in certain areas such as direct marketing, major donor and trust fundraising.
- Fewer junior roles in the last 2 years but we have seen an increase in the number of internships.
- Recruiting Managers are prepared to wait to find the right candidate even if this means leaving a vacancy unfilled.

About Us

For those of you not familiar with the Kage Partnership, we have been recruiting Fundraisers, PR and Marketing professionals to positions at all levels within the not-for-profit sector for the last 13 years.

We conduct our business with integrity and courtesy, providing a tailored and effective service to all of our job seeking and recruiting clients.

Currently we are also offering a discount of 10% on all of our recruitment fees up until the end of December 2010.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of recruitment please do not hesitate to contact us:

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