

# Leading Up

Transformational  
Leadership  
for Fundraisers

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LILYA WAGNER



WILEY

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



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*This book is dedicated to my colleagues and friends of  
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and faculty. Thank you for supporting my efforts and work,  
for providing opportunities for me to excel, and for the  
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# Preface

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**F**undraising professionals must employ many leadership skills in order to carry out their responsibilities, yet many are not in top or designated leadership positions. As a result, if they are successful, they provide leadership in the truest sense—leadership that doesn't come from position or power but leadership that is built on proven characteristics. Leaders in fundraising motivate, serve as examples, manage, communicate, and make renewal possible. Leading without authority isn't easy, but is essential for the successful fundraising professional. The plethora of books that are available on leadership—books that have a variety of approaches and viewpoints—provide little discussion on leading up. Even though the topic has increased in coverage and popularity, there are very few materials that apply leadership principles and practices specifically to the fundraising profession and professional. Fundraisers deserve to know and be taught how to assess their own personal working situations and consider responsibility without authority. Through this book, they can determine what leadership strategies can be used to reach fundraising goals that benefit the organization and its mission, as well as enhance their personal achievement records, while adhering to their own missions and goals.





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## About the Author

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**L**ilya Wagner, EdD, CFRE, is Vice-President for Philanthropy at Counterpart International, based in Washington, DC. Previously, she served at the Center on Philanthropy and The Fund Raising School at Indiana University, where she was also director of the Women's Philanthropy Institute.





# Introduction

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Life is like a jigsaw puzzle but you don't have the picture on the front of the box to know what it's supposed to look like. Sometimes, you're not even sure if you have all of the pieces."<sup>1</sup> This comment is taken from *A Whack on the Side of the Head* by Roger Von Oech. Von Oech believes that there are two main phases in the development of new ideas: an imaginative phase and a practical one. The motto of the first phase is "thinking something different," and the motto of the second phase is "getting something done."<sup>2</sup>

Fundraising professionals are required to engage in both phases—they must accomplish goals and meet expectations, and yet they must also be creative in managing their programs because of the dynamic state of the profession. The concept of leadership in fundraising takes on both phases described by von Oech—fundraising professionals have to get things done but they also need to exercise leadership from whatever rank or position they hold in order to motivate others, and this

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Von Oech, *A Whack on the Side of the Head*, 3rd edition (New York: Warner Books, 1998), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

means “thinking something different.” That’s what this book is about. The essential questions it raises are:

- How do I get things done when I’m not in charge?
- How do I motivate others when I don’t have formal authority?
- How do I convince or persuade my colleagues and superiors of the need for their action and involvement?
- How can I lead when I’m not a recognized leader by virtue of power or position?

The premise is that everyone in the fundraising profession can be and must be a leader and must exercise leadership traits and develop leadership qualities no matter his or her job or position. A leader is one who breaks new paths into unfamiliar territory, recognizes a problem before it turns into an emergency, is reasonable and calm, submerges himself or herself<sup>3</sup> in the fountain of the people, implements noble ideas, is practical and a realist, is a visionary and an idealist, and, sometimes, is the wave pushed ahead by the ship!<sup>4</sup> Many of the traditional qualities of leadership, as will be discussed in this book, apply not just to those who are in recognizable, appointed, usurped, or elected positions of power but also to those who are outside the realm of formal authority. Leadership qualities have to be learned and practiced by all who wish to achieve in fundraising, whether they are the boss or not.

The words of James Kilpatrick are particularly appealing: “Find out where the people want to go, then hustle yourself around in front of

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<sup>3</sup> In order to avoid cumbersome language use, I will alternate the use of gender, sometimes referring to the feminine and sometimes to the masculine, since leadership is gender neutral.

<sup>4</sup> Paraphrased from “Leader,” *Dictionary of Quotable Definitions* by Eugene E. Brussell (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 323–324. The last phrase is by Leo Tolstoy.

them.”<sup>5</sup> This implies that we must listen, analyze, and influence, whether or not our position is one of power. Fundraising professionals have learned that in order to be successful in our demanding profession, we have to learn the art of leading up, which is equivalent to the practice “lateral leadership,”<sup>6</sup> a phrase coined by Harvard negotiation specialist Roger Fisher and his colleague Alan Sharp. As described in an issue of *Harvard Management Update*, a leader is defined by a set of attributes, attitudes, and habits that set a person apart from others. Real leadership has never been about authority, positions of power, or dogmatic dictatorship. It’s about listening, valuing, following advice, and bringing people together for a common goal and vision.

Fundraising professionals often practice leadership without even consciously realizing it. They serve by example, motivate others to action, exercise influence, develop and share a vision, help others catch the vision, plan and lead the action, consider the desires and feelings of others, achieve consensus in a group, and obtain practical results. The leadership skills that fundraisers use range from the concrete, such as bringing a group together for planning, to the ephemeral, such as developing and sharing a vision of what can be.

Fundraising is a noble profession that takes a person beyond mere technique to a higher plane of thought and action. The ideal professional is one who thinks about what he does, implements principles instead of following technical blueprints, and has an ethical basis for what he does.

This book takes up where many others leave off. Leadership books number in the thousands. Many excellent volumes are quoted and

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<sup>5</sup> As quoted in *Good Advice* by William Safire and Leonard Safir (New York: Wing Books, 1982), p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> *Harvard Management Update* (March 2000) presents this concept by Harvard negotiation specialist Roger Fisher and colleague Alan Sharp.