



Engaging your leadership: approval and endorsement are not the same as ownership and commitment

One of the benefits of hiring consultants or “experts,” including fundraisers, is avoiding common mistakes and pitfalls that are often caused by following conventional wisdom or “armchair quarterbacks” within your organization or community. One such mistake is the notion that approval and endorsement of a new program or project - and a campaign to fund it - by an executive board or committee will foster fundraising success. To be sure, such endorsement is a prerequisite to even think about launching a campaign. The mistake (and it’s an easy one to make, even by professionals) is to assume that approval by your leaders will inevitably lead to capacity level investments from them. **In our experience, the bar must be set higher than just “approval and endorsement.”**

Fundraising outcomes will be maximized when your organization’s leaders and other top stakeholders truly buy in to the plan, and are genuinely committed to its funding and execution. We call this “ownership” and over 700 campaigns have proven that the time and effort required to achieve a sense of ownership among the right individuals is one of the most important, and reliable, contributors to campaign success. You may be wondering, *“What’s the distinction between endorsement and ownership, and doesn’t endorsement lead to the same outcomes?”* The easy (but not so helpful) answer is that you’ll know the difference when you see it. But the real distinction is that a leader who **endorses** your efforts will **hope** for your success; may provide some level of fundraising assistance; and will take credit for success – but no responsibility for it.

Conversely, a leader who has taken **ownership** will **ensure** your success by taking personal responsibility and therefore committing his or her time, influence, and financial resources toward that objective. **The truly committed leader has skin in the game, and that can make a major difference in fundraising outcomes.** A summary of the primary benefits of ownership and commitment among top leaders and investors:

- Intense interest in the plan’s strategic details and implementation
- Provides credibility for the plan to those who may be unsure or skeptical of its value and impact
- Help identify, attract, and influence other investors
- Capacity (not token!) financial commitment
- Ensure accountability to investors and the community for fiscal responsibility and effective execution of the plan

We like to say that “leaders follow their money.” If you can get the right leaders to own and commit to your initiative and fundraising campaign, they will invest real money. Once they do that, your campaign – and the initiative being funded – will almost always be successful. And far more successful than if they merely “endorse and approve” it. To learn more about why this distinction matters or how NCDS’ process can help you accomplish this objective and raise more money, contact us at info@ncdsinc.net or visit us at www.ncdsinc.net.