

# How to Hire Your First Development Director

By Leyna Bernstein

*The only thing worse than not having fundraising staff is having bad fundraising staff. To help you avoid the mistakes, many others have made in hiring development staff; we've stolen a script of a scene with consultant **Leyna Bernstein** as she talks with an executive director contemplating hiring fundraising staff for the first time.*

**Olivia, in a tired voice:** As you know, I'm the executive director of a nonprofit, and we've decided we need to hire a development director. We don't have any dedicated fundraising staff right now, and I spend too much of my time raising money. I just can't keep this up.

**Leyna, eyebrows raised:** So your goal in hiring a development director is to free your time from fundraising?

**Olivia:** Yes, of course. But even more than that, we need to raise more money.

**Leyna, with a sympathetic look:** Well, actually the goal of hiring fundraising staff is not to free up the ED *from* fundraising; it's to maximize the use of the executive director's time *in* fundraising. You will probably spend the same amount (or even more) of your time fundraising, but you'll raise more money doing it.

**Olivia:** Wait a minute! Am I going to spend the same amount of time fundraising? (She almost drops her bagel, but catches it.)

**Leyna:** Yes, but your time will be spent more productively. With your new staff on board, you'll have someone to get the thank you notes out on time, the e-blasts was written, the fundraising letters out. Also, this person can track grants, keep on top of deadlines for grant reports, fill out the CFC forms, make sure everything happens on time.

**Olivia:** But if this person is doing all those things, won't I have more time I can devote to strengthening program quality and managing the budget? (Olivia notices cream has curdled in her coffee and she waves at the waitress for new coffee and cream.)

**Leyna:** Umm, probably not. You'll need to spend the freed-up time on relationships with foundations, with donors, with government agencies, with board members, and on writing grants and letters. (Leyna grimaces as she accidentally bites her tongue.)

*Olivia:* But wait a minute! The work you're talking about -- tracking deadlines and sending out fundraising letters -- that's not for someone as highly paid or skilled as a development director, right?

*Leyna:* Right! If your organization doesn't have dedicated fundraising staff, the first position to hire is not a development director. It's a development coordinator or associate. I like the title "development coordinator" because it reminds everyone that this person is coordinating activities, not doing fundraising on their own.

*Olivia:* Actually, hiring a development *coordinator* feels right. But how about helping us with fundraising strategy and getting into major donors, which we really haven't done before? (Nods to self in satisfaction with fresh coffee.)

*Leyna:* Right now you don't have any staff dedicated to fundraising. You need both high-level help with strategy and lower-level help with the details. So first, remember a lot of fundraising is in doing the details right. And instead of paying someone at a development director salary to do support work, hire a development coordinator and then a fundraising consultant for strategy.

*Olivia:* So what qualifications do I look for in a development coordinator?

*Leyna* (trying to pick poppy seed out of teeth unobtrusively): Someone who knows the nonprofit world and is above entry level, and who is interested in fundraising. This person must know their way around the web and be able to string together coherent sentences. They won't be writing the spring appeal, but they'll be working with a lot of written material. Someone who sees this as an opportunity to build a career in fundraising or in the field you work in. It's probably going to be their first job in fundraising.

*Olivia:* Okay, now how do I find such a person?

*Leyna:* Well, you can put it out there on Craigslist, etc., but you're better off networking with board members, volunteers--especially younger volunteers, someone on staff who has good all-around administrative skills and who also volunteers for another nonprofit. Who are your great support staff? Great interns? Great volunteers?

*Olivia, ruefully:* I bet you see a lot of non-profits acting stupid around hiring development staff.

*Leyna:* Well, here are the three stupidest things I see non-profits do. First, they think they should hire a development director when what they need is a development coordinator. Second, they forget to budget for the costs beyond salary, like software,

computer upgrades, the cost of more mailings and collateral, association dues, professional development, and cultivation events. Third, they want to make a big leap with major gifts, so they decide they want someone with a lot of experience with major donors. But they forget that Major Gifts Officers and Development Directors are seldom a department of one. Fundraisers with experience and well-honed skills need support staff and systems in place to enable them to function well.

**Olivia:** I have to confess I don't like the idea of having to train someone completely new to fundraising.

**Leyna:** You won't have to do it all. Get them into fundraising circles like DER (Development Executives Roundtable), AFP, or other groups of people who are doing fundraising, not consulting in fundraising. Ask your experienced board members to coach or mentor them. Send them to grant writing classes and fundraising workshops, so they meet others and get new skills and confidence.

**Olivia, sotto voce:** Don't look now, but I think George Clooney just came into the restaurant behind you.

**Leyna (rapidly swiveling around and standing up):** Where?!



**Leyna Bernstein** ([www.leynabernstein.com](http://www.leynabernstein.com)) is a nonprofit leadership consultant who specializes in executive director and development director search and board development. She has raised money as a volunteer and as the board fundraising chair for three organizations. Before opening her own consulting practice, Leyna was a senior staff member at a Bay Area nonprofit support center, and was a human resources executive in the corporate world. She is based in Albany, California. Leyna's lifelong, unrealized ambition is to be on Dancing With the Stars, preferably with George Clooney