

5 tips for NPO Executive Directors who want to externalize the passion they feel inside

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"Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs are people who have come alive."

– Howard Thurman

When executive directors reveal their passion, community groups feel it and naturally want to join in. Staff is motivated to do their best work. Board members are reinvigorated and ignited to advocate successfully. But for many Executive Directors, unleashing your passion doesn't always come easy. Why? Because they feel as a leader of the day to day workings of a nonprofit they need to maintain a certain image. But displaying passion can truly make the difference in how a nonprofit runs and succeeds. If you feel pressured to hold yourself back but would like to make a more meaningful impact, here are 5 tips to get started.

1) Get crystal clear on the core reason you feel passionate about your cause. A polite answer will only take you so far. When you excavate your deepest reason and articulate it succinctly, people will listen and naturally be drawn to you. Write down the 5 reasons you are passionate about your nonprofit and your role as a leader. Reignite your own passion about why you are there to begin with. The day to day experiences of a leader can often push your passion down. When you remember why you are with a particular nonprofit, it makes it easier to show and live that passion in front of those who want to feel it too.

2) Notice the difference between fighting against something and leading potential donors toward your vision. Sure, you might want to show the harmful effects of smoking for example, but don't get stuck there. Meet people where they are, acknowledge the obstacles and then put your attention on what's possible. Too many people get stuck talking about the problems. Raise their energy level by giving them hope and vividly describing favorable outcomes with specific examples. Notice your own energy level when you speak with your vision in mind. There are

ways to invite people into your world with less effort while gaining more credibility.

3) Give up the need for approval. Ironically, the more you look for approval, the less you'll get. Leave expectations behind and be open to unexpected outcomes. I've worked with many speakers who have an admirable cause but when they get in front of potential donors, their mind starts grasping for approval rather than staying with their goal. These habituated patterns can be difficult to break, but it *is* possible. Ground yourself before you speak by taking some deep, full breaths. Silently name 3 things you admire about yourself and your abilities.

4) Tell more by saying less. Extra, unnecessary words will cover your passion like a heavy, wet blanket. Many executive directors try too hard when they could be more effective with fewer, well-thought out words. For example, instead of saying: "Some people give up too soon. It's sad. They don't give it their all. Some people settle for less and are never truly happy. We work with people who have the potential and aren't using it fully. (Blah, blah, blah)" Try something like this instead: "We all have the potential to be a full-bodied Boreaux, yet sadly most people settle to be Welch's Grape Juice." I remember Gabrielle Roth's line and it's stuck with me ever since. You'll find refreshing language will garner more significant results. Start playing with metaphors. Edit out boring words and add sensory detail to what you say. Wake people up with your words!

5) Let your passion out and tap into the intelligence of your entire body. Your mind is a valuable tool for keeping track of facts and numbers. But when you're talking with potential donors, it's the feeling you create that helps them decide. Be willing to share an emotional story and express it with gestures. Congruent gestures add to the impact of your message. Aimless gestures detract. Feel the words as you say them. If your gestures match the words, you're on the right track. Notice the difference between speakers who are stiff and rigid and speakers who have a sense of flow. Attract more donors by being a walking logo for your nonprofit organization.