

# Part One – an engaging your board in fundraising series in partnership with Xponential Philanthropy

## Sciscophobia: why board members are afraid to ask

*"I read that speaking in front of a crowd is considered the number one fear of the average person. I found that amazing – number two was death! That means to the average person if you have to be at a funeral, you would rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy." - Jerry Seinfeld*

Time and time again surveys show that the fear of public speaking is the greatest fear shared by most people. It consistently ranks higher than the fear of death. But around the board tables and within organisations across the country, I believe 'sciscophobia' would outrank them all.

You won't find sciscophobia in the dictionary and nothing comes up when you Google it. Sciscophobia is not a real word, but it should be. 'Scisco' is Latin for 'ask' and from there you can work out what sciscophobia would mean if it was in the dictionary.

Sciscophobia is no respecter of persons. It can afflict anyone from a member of the school P&C Committee through to the board chair of the largest organisation or company. It is no respecter of age, sex, wealth, power or position. So why is it that sciscophobia, or the fear of asking, is so prevalent and how is it overcome? How do we put fundraising on the personal agendas of our board members?

Engaging board members in fundraising is a goal of every not for profit. Their influence and networks are highly valued and yet seldom utilised, generally because these valuable commodities are not brought to the boardroom table. If you were to ask any of our North American counterparts what the role of a board member should be in terms of fundraising, you will more often than not hear the phrase "give, get or get off" used in their response. It was more than 20 years ago when I first heard the phrase and it sounded fantastic. It was so simple, but so profound: a catchy little phrase that would revolutionise not for profit boards.

Experience 20 years later has shown that it is not the case. In fact, I would go as far as saying that the '3G' approach has more often or not backfired on the chief executive officers (CEO) or professional fundraisers who have tried to carry it into their boardrooms. Sciscophobia is still alive and well in our boardrooms.

Behind every phobia is one basic fear: the fear of the unknown. Claustrophobia is fear of what 'might' happen in a confined space. Agoraphobia is the fear of what 'might' happen in certain environments. Sciscophobia is the fear of what 'might' happen if I was to ask someone for a gift:

- I might be rejected
- I might be embarrassed

- I might lose a relationship

You don't overcome a fear by catchy phrases, you overcome a fear by removing the unknown. One of the areas fundraising consultancy firms such as Xponential Philanthropy specialise in is working with CEO and board members to provide a better understanding of the fundraising and gift solicitation process. Effectively removing the fear of the unknown and replacing it with clear and comfortable strategies for influential gift solicitation.

Having worked with hundreds of organisations across Australia and New Zealand, Xponential has taken an 'evolution not revolution' approach to engaging board members in fundraising. Each year Xponential deliver workshops and seminars to not for profit boards that lead them through the prospect engagement process, discuss the responsibilities of board members and then show them that they don't need to ask!

Before you send your letters to the editor, let me explain that last comment. You see telling your board to "give, get or get off" is a highly confrontational approach which does nothing to deal with the underlying issue of fear. On the other hand, telling the board they do not need to ask not only brings down the fear barrier but will raise the question 'what can we do?'

It is the answers to this question that will engage your board, access their influence and open their networks. Start by asking your board members to:

- Make friends for the cause
- Identify VIP prospects
- Gather friends for social events
- Be involved in 'advice' visits
- Make thank you calls to donors

Pretty soon you will hear comments around the board table like "we should be talking to..." and "I had a great conversation with..." From there, it is just one small step to a board member bringing in your next big gift.

*For more information on Xponential Philanthropy Board Engagement workshops and seminars e-mail [success@xponential.com.au](mailto:success@xponential.com.au) or phone 1300 656 931 (Australia)/0800 000 955 (New Zealand).*



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