

Why Do You Care?



The best board members serve as ambassadors, spreading the word about your organization and its work. When they know what to say, they'll talk more readily with their friends, neighbors, colleagues, and even donors—more readily and more often.

To fill this ambassador role effectively, board members needn't memorize the mission or learn an elevator speech or rehearse the key points of the strategic plan. They just need to articulate why they care. Once they've voiced this, they'll never forget it. And nothing is more powerful than a statement of their own personal commitment.

In addition to finding their own passion and the words to describe it, those who participate in this exercise will come to know each other better, increasing their sense of community and camaraderie.

Why Do This Exercise?

Storytelling is at the heart of fundraising, and people need to be encouraged to tell their stories and the story of your organization

Use This Exercise When

You're building a fundraising team or bringing in new board members or volunteers

Time Required

10 to 15 minutes

Audience

Your board. This exercise also works well for staff and key volunteers.

Setting

A room large enough for your board to move around and mingle. If the weather's nice and you have a reasonably quiet location, this activity works well outdoors, too.

Materials

- Stopwatch and timer
- Bell or whistle
- Paper and pens

FACILITATING THE EXERCISE

1. Hand out paper and pens and ask the following questions:

- What would you say if someone asked why you cared enough to serve on our board?

- What moves you—really moves you—about our organization and its work? How would you talk about that with other people?

Tell them they will soon share their responses with four other board members and give them a few minutes to make notes.

2. When they've finished writing, describe the exercise as follows. "When I say to begin, please stand up and find a partner. If you don't know the person well, introduce yourself. Then take about thirty seconds each to tell your stories. When I ring the bell, move on to another person. We will do this four times."
3. After four rounds, ask everyone to be seated. Debrief the exercise using some combination of the following questions:
 - What was the experience like?
 - What were your colleagues saying?
 - Was this exercise easy or difficult for you? Why?
 - What did you learn from others?
 - Did you find that your language changed with each new partner? If so, how?
 - Were you surprised by anything you said? Or anything you heard?
4. After the debriefing, summarize any key points. You might comment, for example, on how everyone found it easy to talk about why they care. Or you might note that many mentioned the power of a particular program. Or you might just comment on the energy level in the room and how their enthusiasm was contagious.
5. Conclude the exercise by asking the group for their thoughts about how you might apply the ideas you generated to improve your fundraising.

We thank Gail Perry of Fired Up Fundraising for sharing this exercise.

TRAINING TIP Even with simple exercises like this one, it's helpful to give very clear instructions so everyone knows exactly what's expected. If you're a new facilitator, you might choose to write the instructions or have this book handy.