

Career Growth for the Development Executive

Effective organizations promote career growth. Hopefully, employees can continue to grow within the same organization, though that's not always possible. The following suggestions will help a development professional progress in his or her career.

1. See career growth as a responsibility as well as an opportunity.

People who work in the non-profit sector usually have a mission orientation. They like to do well by doing good. Doesn't it make sense that the more effective someone can be, the better the organization is able to serve people? In this way, career growth is a responsibility. We get better in order to be more effective, not just grow our careers.

2. Be the very best you can be in your current position.

This is not what people want to hear sometimes, but it's valuable advice. No matter where you are in the organization, be the very best you can be. Go beyond what is required. Invest yourself into being at the top of your game in whatever position you hold. That will prepare you for and make you more attractive for more responsibility. Become a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) to prepare you for your next steps.

3. Determine what's most important.

Don't get stuck majoring in the minors. In any job, there are priorities. Focus on them first. Remember that just because something appears to be urgent, it's not always important. Also remember that there's a world of difference between being *busy* and being *effective*. People who specialize in effectiveness see the most career growth.

4. Negotiate.

Avoid all-or-nothing thinking when you're dealing with your current employer or a prospective one. Though it sounds cliché, work for win-win situations. This does one very important thing for you: *it provides you with the most options*. By your willingness to negotiate, you are often able to get what you desire without having to issue ultimatums.

5. Pick one of 5 paths: generalist, management, support, annual gifts, or major gifts.

In fundraising, these are the main paths (and, of course, there are variations on these themes). A *generalist* likes to do a little of everything. A *management-focused* pro devotes more energy to executive pursuits. *Support* pros gravitate to

the back room operations of development like information systems and research. If you specialize in **annual gifts**, you're going to spend your days with direct mail, mass solicitation, giving clubs, and special events. **Major gift** pros deal with larger gifts, capital campaigns, planned gifts, and grants. While it's possible to go from one path to another, most people settle into one of these five paths. They gain a reputation for being especially effective in one of these areas.

6. Network.

This is such a no-brainer for a development professional— get connected to others who can help you with your career growth. There are professional associations and individuals who do what you do who are willing to provide guidance. Development pros tend to be very collegial, so take advantage of it.

7. Be helpful.

Don't seek out people just to see what they can do for you. Return the favor whenever you can. Be helpful to people, even if you don't see a direct benefit to you. If you are collegial in your relationships, that is always seen as a plus.

8. Train.

When I started in development as a prospect research manager, I decided I wanted to move into planned gifts. I prepared and trained for three years before I had the opportunity to do some work in that area. If I had not worked at it in advance, I might've missed a golden opportunity.

9. Thank people.

This is another no-brainer for development pros. Say thanks as often as you can, as sincerely as you can, as cheerfully as you can.

The development field needs people who are career-minded. Those people become great investments in our important non-profit organizations.

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