

# The Role of An Interim Development Executive: Do's and Don'ts

There are times when it's important to bring in talent and experience to temporarily lead the development function. This allows an organization time to *redefine priorities* and *conduct a search while still raising money*. Counsel can fill this role for you, but there are some clear Do's and Don'ts:

## 1. Do clearly define the role.

The interim executive needs to have clearly defined priorities. He/she should spend time in the most crucial areas identified with the organization's President/Chief Executive Officer. Likewise, the interim executive should avoid areas that are not agreed to. It's helpful to begin with a three or six month contract, leaving it open-ended for when a permanent executive is able to begin.

## 2. Do position the interim executive as the temporary leader of the development program.

The interim executive needs to have enough authority to get the job done. He/she may delegate some of that authority, but it must be there to begin with. This comes from the President/CEO.

## 3. Do set up all necessary communication channels.

Especially in the early times of the assignment, the interim executive will need "face time" with the President/CEO to make sure things are moving along in the right ways. The interim should have the experience and maturity to know what needs the President's attention and what doesn't.

## 4. Do challenge the interim executive to maintain or grow performance.

Even though he/she is an interim, it's important to establish or maintain momentum. This can be done artfully without re-engineering the development program (though some changes may be in order). Sometimes, a different perspective can help fundraising grow even in interim times.

## 5. Do allow for flexibility in scheduling.

Counsel may not work full-time for you as an interim executive, meaning that he/she will have other clients. This is a time for mutual flexibility. Experienced Counsel will know how to juggle competing demands.

## 6. Don't allow the interim executive to be a candidate for the permanent position.

Sometimes it happens that the results are good and the chemistry is good and the organization wants to make the interim executive permanent. *This is not advisable.* Why? If the interim comes into the position with aspirations for the permanent position, he/she loses perspective, objectivity, and credibility. Each move is seen as one to position him/her for the permanent job instead of focusing on interim leadership and results. It's also unfair to staff who may try to please a potential permanent "boss" instead of working collegially with someone who will intentionally work himself/herself out of a job.

**7. Don't allow the interim executive to make commitments that are inappropriate.**

One reason clear communication is essential is so the interim executive doesn't overstep his/her bounds. Seasoned Counsel is less likely to do this, but it needs to be watched. Any busy executive can miss the context of decisions and practices, especially if he/she is new to the culture of the organization.

**8. Don't allow the interim executive to begin new programs or emphases without a clear understanding and approval from the President.**

The interim executive may suggest new ways of doing things and may even be encouraged to do so. This *must* be cleared by the President. For example, it may be highly desirable to begin a planned gifts program, but during an interim time, it's not the right moment to get started. Any new programs or significant departures from past practices needs the President's nod in advance.

An interim executive can bring energy, knowledge, experience, and talent to an organization during a critical time. Once the ground rules are agreed upon, Counsel can step in and help the non-profit by maintaining and even growing its fundraising program.

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