

AFP Central PA Chapter “Vignettes” Program Presentation 4/13/2010
PASSION FOR THE CAUSE, RESPECT FOR THE PROFESSION
Barbara Taylor, CFRE ~ btaylor@lutheranscp.org ~ 717-854-4425 x408

Principle: This vignette is intended to illustrate the most important principle in my role as a professional fundraiser – passion for the organization I represent and embrace.

Vignette: Most individuals do not aspire to be a fundraiser, rather we “fall into the work.” When I fell into the profession after 20 years of work in the for profit sector, I was blessed to begin my fundraising career working for the North Carolina Zoological Society. It became very clear to me early on what my role was not – and believe it or not, it was not to raise money for the zoo. My role was to educate and motivate others to become so engaged with our work that they felt inspired to invest their time, their talent and their financial resources to help further our cause.

My career has offered me the opportunity to represent numerous nonprofit organizations. I continue to support each of these excellent organizations because I became so entrenched in their service, their research, their hope for the future that I cannot walk away from them ... even though I do not formally represent the cause today.

How does one become totally, completely passionate for their work? When I worked for the Zoo I witnessed the birth of a lowland gorilla, an endangered species. I saw children, who will never travel outside of North Carolina, must less to Africa, learn about the importance of saving a piece of wildlife for future generations. I have rejoiced through my tears with a mother and father sitting in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) as the doctor told them that finally after 5 long months they could take their precious little baby home – born weighing only 22 ounces, the research of the March of Dimes continues to give hope to the frailest and most vulnerable. Representing the American Red Cross I have shed tears and hugged a couple as they stood by the burned out shell of their home, while offering them a roof over their head, a hot meal, clothing and hope for another day. I now sit with members of the greatest generation, individuals who lived modestly their entire life and now face the reality that they have outlived their savings and risk losing their home and care. Lutheran Social Services has never asked anyone to leave because they could not afford to pay the full cost of their care – could you put someone out on the street at this most precarious time in their life?

How can you represent an organization or a cause and not engage with those you serve?

I challenge any and all newcomers to the fundraising profession, and unfortunately, some who have tenured careers, to stop and evaluate your passion for your work. Do you wear your heart on your sleeve? Do those you speak to hear a robotic elevator speech, which we are all instructed to prepare our first weeks on the job, or do they hear your total, complete and unabashed passion and commitment to your cause?

If you do not believe in your cause, find a new one or consider a different profession. We are not raising money – we are educating and inspiring others, motivating them to invest in our organization. Believe! Respect the fundraising profession and let your passion truly make a difference today and for generations to come.