

When You're Invited Because of Your Money...

Use Your Money to Lead!

By Ruth Ann Harnisch

When I was invited to join the governing board of a prestigious organization, one of my colleagues offered sincere congratulations, but I could tell she was holding something back. "Are you worried that they asked me because of my money?" I asked. "Yes," she said. "I hope that doesn't hurt your feelings." I laughed. "Of course they asked me because of my money. It's one of the most important things I can bring to the table!"

Over the last thirty years, I have received many invitations to take leadership positions in nonprofit organizations. At first, they came because of my work as a television, newspaper, and radio journalist. My recognizable name looked good on the letterhead; my media contacts and experience made me a valuable team member. These days, boards are more interested in my capacity to be a major donor. To some, that is my primary qualification for leadership. I'm not uncomfortable with that reality; money is necessary to make things work. So I have learned how to use the opportunities money gives me for leadership, and I encourage you to do the same. Here are some ways that money can enable you to exercise your ability to be a leader.

1. You can lead by demonstrating thoughtful, strategic, philanthropic decision-making

If you spend time and effort developing a philanthropic vision, you will know how you want to use your money to achieve your own and others' goals. When I accept a leadership role, it's

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because I have carefully considered how that investment—of money, time, energy, ideas, and other assets—will help me advance my own and the organization's philanthropic vision. When I say *yes*, it's because I can confidently say *why*. And when I say *no*, I can say *why not* in a way that might help the organization court the next candidate on its list.

2. You can lead by demonstrating generosity

Big gifts are called "leadership gifts" partly because they model leadership in generosity. Leadership gifts aren't just impulsive "cheerleadership"—they're strategic gifts designed to open hearts and wallets. When you lead by demonstrating generosity, others may be inspired to say, "If so-and-so is willing to give that much, I'm willing to give this much."

3. You can lead by creating imaginative possibilities

Sometimes, the mere presence of someone with a lot of money to share allows people to let their imaginations soar. There is something about the possibility of a large gift that leads people to think bigger, to wonder "What if?" When I gave More Than Money its first million-

dollar gift, it instantly created possibilities previously unimagined. Others were able to envision an expanded organization, attracting more members, and having a greater influence on the wider world. Before the first dollar of the pledge had been paid, the mere promise unleashed a wealth of possibilities; and large contributions from others followed.

4. You can lead by creating real possibilities

Real money means real things can be done. My contributions have made it possible for organizations to add employees, rent warehouse space, purchase supplies, hire speakers, send staff to conferences, buy a cake, and have a party. Money fuels this kind of leadership—if you pay for it, someone will build it.

5. You can lead by having time to lead

Filmmaker Woody Allen has said that 80 percent of success is showing up. If you are to lead, you must show up physically. Money has given me a greater ability to show up in every way. It makes it possible for me to travel to distant board meetings, to be present at work sessions, to make phone calls and do legwork, to

Reprinted from Issue 35, "Money and Leadership"

More Than Money Journal | Issue Number 35

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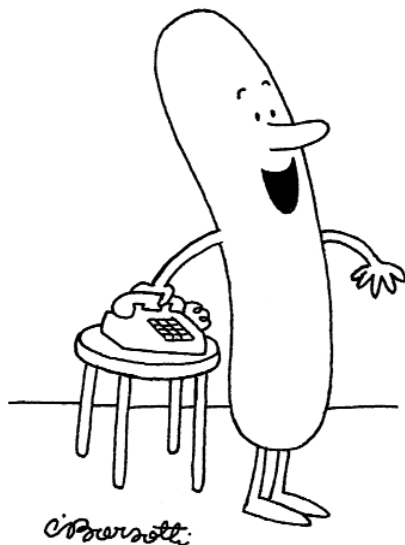
attend open houses. It also buys me time. I am not on an employer's time clock; I can hire people to do certain necessary, time-consuming tasks. These privileges give me time to think about an organization and its challenges. Time is a luxury that can be used to lead.

6. You can lead by improving your leadership skills

If you can afford to attend classes and skill-building workshops, to buy books, and to hire coaches and consultants, then, by all means, do so. I do all those things, becoming a better leader by learning from the best.

7. You can lead by using your money to hire leaders

If your own leadership skills or available time aren't sufficient to the task, you can use your money to outsource leadership. My financial contributions have helped to hire search firms to find top candidates for leadership positions, to increase salaries to attract great leaders, to hire consultants to jump-start fundraising, and to pay for professional organizers to run events. It's a great way to 'share the wealth'—and the leadership.



"Hey, everybody, we're invited to a cookout!"

8. You can lead by training and empowering other leaders

Real leaders know they're not irreplaceable. They are constantly looking for the next generation of leadership, and are not afraid to share their power with those who may step into their shoes one day. You can lead in this way by paying for training, giving scholarships, and sponsoring workshops and speakers.

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9. You can lead by virtue of the Golden Rule

I've heard two versions of the Golden Rule. The less-quoted one is, "He who has the gold makes the rules." If you make a major philanthropic contribution, you may be tempted to make the rules at the beneficiary charity, and some nonprofits may be tempted to let you do that.

In a session of The Philanthropy Game at a national More Than Money conference, some participants playing the role of nonprofit executives radically altered the core goals of their charities in order to woo certain major donors. If they didn't get funding, they were out of the game, so they were willing to abandon their founding principles in order to get grants that would allow them to survive for another round.

Sadly, that happens in real life, too.

When I make a major gift, it is because I am personally involved and confident that my input will help maximize the effectiveness of my philanthropic investment. It's not my style to write a big check and disappear. I would consider that an abdication of leadership and a poor stewardship of my money. If my powerful

participation were not welcomed—not grudgingly tolerated as a condition of getting my money—I would hope that the leaders of the organization would have the courage and principles to refrain from accepting the cash.

Ideally, both parties would abide by the original version of the Golden Rule, treating each other as respectfully as they wished to be treated. Major donors would not act like Bigfoot, and non-profit leaders would speak honestly about the relationship they want with their donors and how the donor's money affects their mission.

10. You can lead by investing in the political system

Political leaders set the agenda for the nation. I may not like the fact that money is the lifeblood of political campaigns, but until there is genuine reform, that's the way it is. You can finance your own campaign for public office, and you can contribute to the campaign coffers of candidates who share your vision of the way things ought to be. I contribute to individual candidates; I sponsor candidate-training workshops that encourage political novices to offer themselves for public service and teach them how to run an effective race; I give to initiatives dedicated to reform of the campaign finance laws and the voting system; and I give to lobbying groups and think tanks that influence lawmakers.

I've had the privilege of interviewing thousands of leaders. Most of them were once ordinary people who, at some stage of their lives, found the courage and the reason to lead something. That's what makes a great leader—courage and cause. Money is just a V.I.P. ticket that gets you past the velvet ropes. ■