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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 23: CRIS WINEINGER – LEADERSHIP IN THE NON PROFIT SPACE

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The weekly podcast brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from all across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. At some point in your career, if you haven't already, you'll become involved in fundraising for a non-profit organization. Whether you're asked to lead a campaign at work or as a board member or a community leader, most professionals spend some time in the non-profit fundraising arena. For some, it's exciting and rewarding work. For others, it's the last thing they want to do. Well, Cris Wineinger has been helping non-profits function at a high level for 25 years. She provides organizations and individuals with guidance in terms of Non-profit Management and fundraising. She joins us on the podcast today to discuss the ins and outs of fundraising. Here's our conversation with Cris Wineinger.

Ken White

Cris, thank you for joining us. You're busy. You're going all over the world, it seems. But thank you for spending some time with us today here on the podcast.

Cris Wineinger

Thank you. It's great to be here.

Ken White

Tell us about your background in terms of what you're doing these days and how you got there.

Cris Wineinger

Well, I am a consultant to non-profit organizations. I've done this for goodness. I haven't counted it in a while, about 25 years, and I got started doing this in this field despite the fact that I have an MBA, but I came out of graduate school and was living in Bermuda. So like so many of us, Bermudians went into banking and realized two things very quickly.

One, I really don't like banking, and two, more importantly, I was really bad at banking. Really bad at banking.

Ken White

Those are two signs, then, aren't they?

Cris Wineinger

Yeah, it was kind of telling me something. So I was actually approached by some investors who were getting ready to build Bermuda's very first National Gallery of Art. A gentleman had passed away and had left a magnificent collection of art with the proviso that they build a museum. And so, my first non-profit gig was to help fund and build the Bermuda National Gallery. And from there, I went on to be the executive director of a few non-profits and then, from there, went into consulting.

Ken White

And you've spent considerable amount of time with capital campaigns and putting those together for organizations. When you're getting ready to do that, what are some of the first steps because so many executives and listeners to our podcast will be involved in fundraising at some point in their career? So how do you start off that campaign?

Cris Wineinger

Well, I think before you even call somebody like me. The first thing you really need to have is what we call a compelling case for support, a really good reason to do this. And what I mean by that is, let's say you're contemplating a new building. You need to be able to answer pretty much one key question. What will that building allow us to do that we can't do now? If you can answer that in a compelling way, then you have a really good reason to do a capital campaign.

Ken White

Compelling in terms of the organization or others.

Cris Wineinger

Oh, good question. No compelling in its ability to change lives.

Ken White

Oh, very interesting.

Cris Wineinger

So it isn't just that we need this building in order to offer this program. It's we need this program in order to change lives.

Ken White

So this is pretty big stuff. It's got to be big in order for you to even attempt to take that step.

Cris Wineinger

It doesn't necessarily have to be big, dollar-wise.

Ken White

Right.

Cris Wineinger

But it needs to be compelling in its ability to change lives. Yes.

Ken White

So when you're out fundraising, I think one of the things when I talk to people about fundraising who haven't done it, they tend to think it's almost begging. How do you? What would you say to folks who see it that way? What is it really like?

Cris Wineinger

Well, let me put it this way if you're begging, you're asking really badly. Would be the first thing I would tell you. But really good successful fundraising is focused on the donor. We always talk about donor-centered fundraising, and what that means is before you even ask a donor for his support, you spend a lot of time having conversations with him when the ask is not in the room. And the reason you have those conversations is so you can understand what is important to that donor. Every donor has their own philanthropic priorities. Those things they want to see happen in the world. And so you want to be in a position where you are actually inviting the donor to do something that's already very important to him.

Ken White

Right.

Cris Wineinger

That's a successful ask. And that's not begging.

Ken White

Right. And the donor knows, I mean, they know why you're there.

Cris Wineinger

Yeah. The best part about that is when the donor makes his gift. He feels really good about what he's just done. He doesn't feel like he's had his arm twisted and that he's trying to find a gracious way of getting you out of the room. And by the same token, you feel really good about having made an ask that was comfortable and successful. And if you do it that way, chances are he's going to support you again.

Ken White

Right. So good fundraising is a win-win situation. You just hit on something that I hear from fundraisers in higher education and other places that once someone gives, the likelihood of them giving again increases. Is that fairly standard?

Cris Wineinger

Well, that depends on how well you engage them in your organization between gifts. So one of the biggest mistakes I see fundraisers make is the only time their donors ever hear from them is when they want something. So if, instead, you report back to the donor on a regular basis about what his investment is helping you to do, then you are more likely not only to get a second gift but to get a larger gift.

Ken White

You hear the term donor fatigue. How does that come in?

Cris Wineinger

I do hear that a lot from non-profits and my thought on that is this, I don't I think we do have a lot of donor fatigue out there. I don't disagree with that, but I don't think we have donor fatigue because people have been asked too much. I think we have donor fatigue because people have been asked badly. Because we do have situations where the only time a donor hears from a non-profit is when they want something. Because we're not having conversations with donors when the ask is not in the room because we're not engaging them in the work that we do, and we're not in those situations. We're not reporting back on what their money is helping us to accomplish.

Ken White

That's interesting because I'll often hear people say, especially in a higher ed space, alumni. That's the only time I hear from the organization is when they want money, and that's not true. The organization is trying to communicate, but they're not connecting. Have you run into situations like that?

Cris Wineinger

Yes, and I tell you what perception is everything. So you may think that you have communicated with them, but if they don't remember it, then you didn't.

Ken White

Oh, that's a great point.

Cris Wineinger

And so you need to rethink how you're communicating with them. One thing I'm always teaching non-profits to do is when you have a new donor ask him how and when he'd like to hear from you. What's the best way to communicate with you? Do you prefer that we communicate with you through email? Do you prefer the written letter? Would you like a visit from us once a year? Let the donor be in charge.

Ken White

How simple. I mean, that's other-centric communication. That's perfect.

Cris Wineinger

Yes.

Ken White

You and I mentioned before we recorded or you mentioned the investor versus the donor. What do you mean by that?

Cris Wineinger

Well, I think it's important that we think of our donors as investors, and if they're investors, a good investor, a successful investor is looking to determine what's my return on investment, so if I've given you one hundred thousand dollars what have you done with that hundred thousand dollars. What has been your return on investment? And there's actually a formula you can use, and instead of ROI return on investment, we talk about SROI, the social return on investment. And so if when you think that way, you're really able to demonstrate to the donors how his dollars are making a difference. How his dollars are helping to solve a social problem that's very important to him. That's treating someone like an investor. If you treat them like a donor, you're simply trying to determine how many times can I ask successfully.

Ken White

So you have to make the case, as you said right up front. You've got to have the right case for support.

Cris Wineinger

Yes, you do.

Ken White

Then you're making the connection which is cultivating the donor. We often hear that. Then you get the gift, and it's not even close to being done, then it's all the communication back.

Cris Wineinger

Oh, well yeah. Because once the donor makes a gift, that's not the end. That's the beginning of your relationship with that donor. And so how well you continue to engage him in the work that you're doing and how much you continue to learn about what's important to him, that's going to make for a lifelong relationship with that donor. And if you really do it well when he passes on, he'll remember you.

Ken White

Right.

Cris Wineinger

And definitely in his will.

Ken White

We'll have more conversation with Cris Wineinger on the ins and outs of fundraising in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. If you're looking to improve your leadership and business skills, the Center for Corporate Education has some terrific programs scheduled in the upcoming weeks. Finance for the non-financial professional, rapid cycle innovation for healthcare professionals, and a five-day certificate program in business management are all on the calendar. For more information, check out the center's website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with Cris Wineinger on the ins and outs of non-profit fundraising.

Ken White

In those various steps, is there a certain place where some or most organizations seem to sort of fall off the track? Is there one they don't quite get as good as the others?

Cris Wineinger

I think one area that they sometimes do forget is recognizing that in fundraising, and I have never ever seen a campaign that breaks this rule in all the years I've done this. And I got a lot of gray hair. But every campaign I've ever done, I would say that 90 percent of the dollars they receive come from 10 to 15 percent of the donors, period. And so it is

vitaly important that you know who those 10 to 15 percent of those people are and that you know what's important to them and that they've heard from you on a regular basis not as an ask but on you reporting back to them. And on you asking for their feedback and their input and their advice. That's the part that so many non-profits lose sight of.

Ken White

What about the other 15 percent or so? Do you still try to communicate with them?

Cris Wineinger

You mean the other 85 percent.

Ken White

Or 85 percent, right, yeah.

Cris Wineinger

It's okay, my math. I'm lousy with numbers. It makes me a great fundraiser. I'm also really bad with names.

Ken White

What about the bulk? I mean, you're looking at all these thousands of people, but so many organizations are pummeling away trying to reach them with messages too. Is that worth the time and the energy to do that?

Cris Wineinger

The short answer to the question is yes. Of course, it's always worth engaging the broader base of your donors because that broader base of donors that's where you're going to find your major donors. So you always want to be working on that broader base of donors. But the thing to recognize is that if you're looking for a return on your investment as a fundraiser, it's going to be at the top of that gift chart. So that's where you're really going to make your money.

Ken White

You told me a story earlier about legacy and leadership. Could you share that story with us?

Cris Wineinger

Oh yeah. That was a good story. This was a few years back, and I was working on a non-profit with their capital campaign, and we were looking for a chairman of the campaign, and we knew exactly who we wanted to chair that campaign. And he was a very successful, very high-level executive who was actually getting close to retirement. And so I went to

see him with the chairman of the board, and we had a great conversation, and he was trying to decide if he was going to chair this campaign or not. And so I asked this gentleman if I could be frank for a moment, and he said okay. And I really took a great risk because I said to him you've had an incredible career in this company. But I would say to you that two weeks after you walk out of this door, not very many people, not the broader base of people, are going to remember the CEO of this company. They're going to know who the new CEO is for sure, but what they will remember is that you built that new hospital. What they will remember is that you brought a new level of healthcare to this community that's been desperately needed for some time. Luckily for me, he agreed with that.

Ken White

Yeah.

Cris Wineinger

And but that was really a conversation about leadership versus legacy.

Ken White

Yeah.

Cris Wineinger

And when we were doing the campaign with him, I remember him often saying to people, to fellow executives, he would say like you, we're the busiest people on the planet. He said, but healthcare is really important to me, and so I make time in my schedule for that. He was a great chairman had a very, very successful campaign.

Ken White

Wow. What is it you like about fundraising?

Cris Wineinger

I like that fundraising, or maybe I may broaden your question if I can.

Ken White

Sure.

Cris Wineinger

I like for me working with non-profits. I feel like I have the ability to watch the world change.

Ken White

Wow.

Cris Wineinger

In a good way.

Ken White

Yeah.

Cris Wineinger

And I get to see direct results. And for me, that's very motivating. I love it.

Ken White

If someone you mentioned, you know you call on folks CEOs and other people if one of our aspiring leaders is listening to the podcast and has not been approached about a role in a fundraising effort but now suddenly is being approached what should they expect. What should they ask? Because this is this could be a considerable amount of time that they don't always have. If they're being asked to give to this effort.

Cris Wineinger

I think the first thing they should ask themselves is, is this something that's very important to me? Is it very important to me to see this change happen in the world? And do I believe that this project is going to make that change a reality? So he's really got to ask that very high-level gut question first. I think the second thing he should ask himself is it's actually a question that many donors ask themselves, but do I believe that that organization can do what they say they're going to do? So if their goal is to raise 20 or 30 million dollars to build a new facility. The second thing he should ask himself is, do I believe they can do that?

Ken White

Yeah.

Cris Wineinger

So he's going into a campaign that is realistic. And then finally my third piece of advice would be make if you do decide that you would like to do this and I hope you do by the way. If you're listening to this and you're contemplating, I really hope you do it.

Ken White

Yeah.

Cris Wineinger

But make it very clear to the organization how you like to work. So I've worked with chairmen of campaigns who can only give me three hours a month. But I'll tell you what, if I know they can give me three hours a month, I'm going to make those three hours count.

Ken White

Right.

Cris Wineinger

I have worked with other campaign chairman who prefer to meet with me every single Monday morning and go over where we are in the campaign and how it's doing. Done. So what's really important is that they let the non-profit know how they like to work, and it's up to that non-profit to use their time efficiently and effectively. However much they can give.

Ken White

It can really be fun when you get into a campaign as a volunteer, can't it?

Cris Wineinger

Oh it, it is. It is a lot of fun, and it is incredibly rewarding. And as you know, as you watch the money come in, and you watch yourself get closer and closer to the goal, it is so so motivating. And the best part is when you actually take over that goal.

Ken White

Yeah, absolutely.

Cris Wineinger

It's a high you get addicted to it.

Ken White

Do you have a good fundraising story that you can share with us that was turned out to be a positive outcome?

Cris Wineinger

I got 25 years in this business. I have enough stories to write a book, and that should never be published until long after I'm gone. Well, how about some fun ones? I think one that was really quite startling to me. I was a young fundraiser, very new in the business, and I was doing a campaign for an organization, and a donor called me and said I understand you're doing a campaign for x, y, z organization. I'd like to talk to you about that. Will you come to my office? Now I knew this gentleman to be a very wealthy person. And so I'm a

young fundraiser. Let me tell you, I was in his office in a nanosecond. I dropped everything. I should have had three speeding tickets. I was at his office. Now I walk into his office, and he said tell me a little bit about the project. So I started to tell him about the project, and after about three minutes, he stopped. He says okay, I've heard enough. I'm going to make a gift. This gentleman wrote me a check for something in excess of a quarter of a million dollars.

Ken White

Wow.

Cris Wineinger

I was, for once in my life, speechless.

Ken White

Yes.

Cris Wineinger

But I couldn't resist asking him. This is an extraordinary gift. I know you're not a donor to this organization. What compelled you to do this? I'm thinking of my book.

Ken White

Yeah.

Cris Wineinger

I got to write this down.

Ken White

Right.

Cris Wineinger

And he looked at me, and he said well, as it turns out, I'm in the middle of a rather sticky divorce, and I don't want my wife to have the money. My first thought was should I take this check? And I thought, yes, we're going to do a lot of good with this.

Ken White

Take it and run.

Cris Wineinger

And I was still speechless.

Ken White

Wow. My favorite story is I know a fundraiser in the higher education space who is a guru in higher education fundraising, and in his first job, he wasn't getting it done. And the President of the institution said if you don't raise a million by the end of summer, we're gonna have to let you go, and it was the next to the last day of the summer, and he hadn't done it. And there was one donor capable, and he called him. And when the gentleman picked up the phone, the stress and the pressure hit the fundraiser, and he just started to cry. And the guy and the donor's on the phone what's wrong, what's wrong. He goes I'm going to lose my job. I get a million dollars. He's fine. I'll give you a pledge the million you got it. And he saved his job, and he went on to have an unbelievable career in higher education. So I'm sure there are all kinds of really fun stories out there what's up next for you. What are some of the projects you're working on, and what's ahead for the new year?

Cris Wineinger

Well, oh my goodness, we have a lot going on. One thing that I have found very interesting is that the landscape of fundraising has changed dramatically as a result of the recession. And I don't believe it will ever be the same again. But I think a lot of good has come out of it. So I find myself these days working with many non-profits, not necessarily to do big capital campaigns but teaching them how to engage major donors. And how to build a foundation of support that they can count on for years to come as opposed to the one-off projects. The other thing I find myself working on these days is perhaps the other side of the table, and that is helping foundations to build strategic plans so that they're giving. They like to think giving strategically as opposed to responding to the requests that come in. And I have found myself facilitating some really fascinating discussions with foundation board members and helping them to answer the most basic question, which is what do you care about. And then building giving strategies around that, I thoroughly enjoyed that. But I will tell you when all said and done, I'm a fundraiser at heart.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Cris Wineinger, and that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you get to the next level in your career with business and leadership development programs that specifically fit your needs. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education for you or your organization, check out our website at wmleadership.com. That's wmleadership.com. Thanks to our guest this week, Cris Wineinger, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe and productive week.