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**The Three R's of Fundraising Leadership (and Three More for Good Measure)**

**Nigel Harris MBA CFRE FFIA**

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With so many books, conversations and insights on leadership it can be difficult to navigate through to what works, what suits and what's missing. Context is critical, and while these leadership observations will apply across many situations they are offered through the lens of leadership in fundraising.

In the interests of keeping it simple, the three Rs of fundraising leadership (and three more for good measure) identify leadership essentials for the fundraising professional. They are framed by experience and referenced in evidence. Each of these 'R's' are identified in leadership literature and commentary.

I have woven them together specifically for a conversation on leadership and fundraising.

The first three themes - Relevance, Relationships and Results are presented in a deliberate order. The next three - Resilience, Respect and Reflection - underpin the first three. Together, they shape a leadership framework that while broad in application has specific reference to fundraising practice.

**Relevance**

Topping my list is **Relevance**

So why is this important? What does it actually mean? And how do we address relevance?

It is about the need to stand for something, and define who you are and what you do. It also emphasises difference, influence and making things happen

In short, as a leader, you need to matter

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Leadership speaker Mark Sanborn puts relevance, or staying relevant, at the head of his list of great fears most leaders possess. He identifies that "the ability to create results" is dependent on relevance

Sanborn also reflects on the agility leaders need to be and stay relevant. He observes the need for leaders to be in the present rather than resting on past success and also makes the point that thinking can be frozen in time - so 'unfreeze' yourself as a leader.

Other themes that emerge in considering relevance and leadership include;

- Read, listen, engage - be a student of the world
- Understand your market and your customers - their challenges and needs - and anticipate them as you can
- Be innovative and creative
- Saying relevant is hard
- Relevance is rooted in change and growth and paying attention - it is about continuous improvement
- Take care of yourself - mentally, physically and emotionally

Dr Nido Qubein focusses on difference and influence

"By fitting in and pleasing others you lose relevance. Difference, not sameness, enhances relevance and increases influence. Compete with your difference"

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Dan Rockwell, Leadership Freak, offers two lists on relevance - and a bonus tip!

**7 Relevance enhancers**

1. Solutions you find for yourself and others. The problem you want to forget enhances relevance
2. Passion to serve people. The relevance of making things better is the way it impacts people. Management is about people
3. Compassion combined with high standards
4. Engagement overcomes isolation
5. Resilience. Everyone who quits, steps toward oblivion. Find someone who believes in you. Be a person who believes in others.
6. Gratitude
7. Honesty with kindness

**5 tips for standing out**

1. Express positive intention
2. Share your story, but beware of whining
3. Enjoy approval from others, but don't need it
4. Prepare for haters. Everyone who stands out meets haters
5. Don't try to stand out, be yourself

**Bonus:** Fail while trying, but whatever you do, try

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While Australian social researcher, Michael McQueen, also offers insights by way of lists

### 5 roads to irrelevance

1. Shift Happens - we need to account for the 5 big shifts of societal, demographic, market, technological and legislative change that threaten our brand or organisation
2. The Intoxication of Success - become aware of the four symptoms of complacency, conceit, closed-mindedness and conformity
3. Preservation Obsession - the need to acknowledge the symptoms of glorification of the past, over-emphasising process and stubborn fixation on traditions.
4. Progress Addiction - beware of the 'dark side' of innovation, such as unbridled pursuit of growth and moving away from your core DNA
5. The Human Factor - acknowledging that human traits are often one of denial, short sightedness and poor judgement - humans are far from logical

### 6 strategies for achieving enduring 'viability and vitality;

- If we re-calibrate, re-focus, re-refresh, re-engineer, re-frame and re-position, we will have a greater chance of remaining relevant

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## Relationships

This one may be obvious, but if that is so, why do we seem to overlook it and need to be reminded?

We are talking about, as leaders, connecting with people, and bringing people with you. We are talking about themes such as awareness, empathy, political savvy, finding a way. And we are talking about understanding people, organisations and systems.

Steve Keating, Lead Today, says "authentic leaders make building real relationships with their people one of their top priorities. They are intentional about it. They will literally schedule time into their day to 'relationship build'".

Mike Morrison offers up the insight that "the world is not made up of things - it is made up of relationships". He identifies five points in discussing leadership strengths through relationships

1. We achieve results primarily through relationships
2. My message to leaders is actually quite simple: It's the relationship ... stupid
3. Some relationships form fast - most don't
4. Followers overemphasise the importance of relationships
5. Leaders underestimate the significance of relationships

John Baldoni advocates these key points;

1. Learn to read people
2. Do unto other as you would have them do unto you
3. Put yourself out there

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He also identifies an interesting, slightly paradoxical, perspective;

- Relationships and collaborations are essential but neither negates the need for strong leadership. Organisations cannot rule by consensus
- Strong leadership does not negate the need for relationships or collaboration; it embraces them. Leaders by themselves achieve very little.

There is a sage reminder in Dale Carnegie's advice. "When dealing with people, remember that you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion"

While Roger Enrico states an uncomfortable truth in saying "the soft stuff is always harder than the hard stuff".

So this is all well and good when are talking about leading people, but what of leadership in environments where the leadership dimension is different, more complex, even more skewed

Leading within organisations, including leading up and across. Leading volunteers, including volunteers who are your 'leaders'. Leading across organisations, related or connected in some form. Leading in a sector

These are some typical leadership scenarios for fundraising leaders. How do you apply learnings around leadership and relationships to these situations?

## Results

According to Daniel Goleman, 'ask any group of businesspeople the question "What do effective leaders do?" and you'll hear a sweep of answers. Leaders set strategy; they motivate; they create a mission; they build a culture. Then ask "What should leaders do?" If the group is seasoned, you'll likely hear one response: the leader's singular job is to get results

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And here we move our conversation from how leaders need to operate to what they need to accomplish. No argument here - a leader's job is to get things done, accomplish outcomes, and create results that matter.

Friedrich Nietzsche stated that "the most common form of human stupidity is forgetting what we were trying to accomplish". If so, according to Professor Herman "Dutch" Leonard "the most important thing a leader can do in an organisation is remind people what they are there to accomplish".

We can have an interesting conversation if we stay broad in our context, however there may be limited takeaways from this session. Let's focus our attention within the context of fundraising and in particular what results matter, how do we frame them, and how do we get there?

"Naming a result means stating clearly what success looks like - giving partners, grantees, and others an aspirational target against which they can align their leadership. It literally puts everyone on the same page so everyone is clear about what they are working together to achieve."

This observation from Donna Stark, while framed in a broader non-profit context, has resonance with the challenge of leadership in fundraising.

In addition to defining success, fundraising leaders need to play close and constant attention to their role as educators. And in doing so create the context, as well as the models, defining, pursuing, measuring and ultimately identifying results.

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Important questions and issues to address include;

- Organisational context, purpose and stakeholders
- Understanding and engagement in philanthropy and fundraising practice
- Strategy and mechanisms for execution including plans, budgets and resources
- Stakeholder expectations and objectives
- Measurement and reporting models
- What results will have impact and what do you need to do to keep 'shifting the needle'

In his article, Leadership That Gets Results (Harvard Business Review), Daniel Goleman makes these observations about leadership strengths and styles

"Research has shown that the most successful leaders have strengths in the following emotional intelligence competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. There are six basic styles of leadership; each makes use of the key components of emotional intelligence in different combinations. The best leaders don't know just one style of leadership - they're skilled at several, and have flexibility to switch between styles as circumstances dictate."



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These leadership styles are;

1. The coercive style
2. The authoritative style
3. The affiliative style
4. The democratic style
5. The pacesetter style
6. The coaching style

Considering the combination of these different leadership styles, together with emotional intelligence capabilities, is an important platform accomplishing results. Context, expectations, measurement and reporting are also key to managing the accomplishment of results in fundraising.

### **Resilience**

Jim Collins identifies the opposite of success is growth - not failure. A challenging and appropriately thought provoking concept, particularly given our societal disposition to label anything that doesn't resemble success as failure

Collins frames the concepts of the 20 mile march and good leaders leading for the quarter - century. He cites many examples from Roald Amundsen, to Steve Jobs, to Tommy Cooper, to Winston Churchill. Jim Collins tells a good story - and makes an even better point - about the quality of resilience that is common to good leaders.

Bouncing back from adversity is a frequent reference in commentary on resilient leadership. Yet, as Steve Wolinski identifies, resilience is often overlooked as a leadership competency.

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Things will go wrong. For leaders this is an inevitable reality - or at least it should be if you are trying rather than playing safe! And when things go wrong or seem to be running against you, it's rarely if ever personal, so don't make it personal as you respond.

Leaders find a way, and again, to reference Jim Collins, have the professional will and personal humility to respond well when things go wrong, just as they do when they succeed.

Fundraising leadership demands resilience by nature of the intangible nature of philanthropy, the complexity of expectations, the diversity of relationships, and the simplicity of metrics - among other things!

Resilient leaders;

- Regularly engage in deliberate personal re-energisation
- Create the most positive working environment possible
- Demonstrate optimism about the future
- Are quick to blunt the impact of setbacks
- Build strong networks and alliances
- Are open minded and think laterally
- See patterns - and use insights for change
- Watch their mouth

## **Respect**

According to Fundraising author Si Seymour, leaders in fundraising will;

"... Light the way, originate action, take the responsibility, establish the standards, create the confidence, sustain the mood, and keep things moving".

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Peter Drucker makes this observation of leadership;

"A leader has responsibility to his subordinates, to his associates" and he calls on leaders to "keep your eye on the task, not on yourself ... you are a servant".

Neither of these references specifically mention respect - however the theme is clearly evident. Much like respect, whether in relationships, behaviours or within groups or organisations, is evident in its presence or omission. And the difference is so often stark.

Leadership that gives, receives and creates respect is conspicuous in overt and subtle ways and compelling in all that it enables. And for a fundraising leader, called to serve philanthropy, respect is a non-negotiable.

"So what is respect? And what does it mean in leadership?" asks Martin Webster

"Respect is a positive feeling. It's holding someone in high esteem. It's valuing opinions greatly

But why would a leader be held in high esteem? Circumstances maybe. Most likely their credibility. That is, how they treat others. Of being convincing and believable."

Jim Selman says "respect can be seen as an action and that it is possible to create a culture in which people naturally and authentically respect each other"

Paul Meshanko defines respect as "... as an active process of nonjudgmentally engaging people from all backgrounds. It is practised to increase our awareness and effectiveness and demonstrated in a manner that esteems both us and those with whom we interact"

And the wisdom of Lao Tzu offers this observation "when you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everybody will respect you"

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The respect stage is set with many key words and actions:

- Engaging all people
- Increasing awareness and effectiveness
- Bringing esteem to all

"A respectful environment and respectful interactions empower people to be more engaged, healthier, and more productive. This delivers an attitude that flows through to working with people across functions and ultimately, customers who are more satisfied and happy with the products and services delivered. A respectful culture builds growth mindsets.

Respect is core to relationships. It should drive esteem in ourselves and in others. Respect translates to trust. The higher the respect between individuals, teams, and departments, the greater the trust. With solid respect and engaging trust, leaders lead with greater meaning and results"

These comments from Jon Mertz clearly illustrate the importance of respect as a critical leadership focus and also highlight themes that are fundamental to the fundraising leader.

The Respect Effect delivers insights on the impact of respect and practices to ensure it is present in all you do

- Embrace respect in how you lead
- Embrace respect in working across generations
- Embrace respect across the diversity of others

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## Reflection

"As fundraisers, we are sensitive professionals, not just technical practitioners. We are reflective in our service, and we are servant leaders to the community, to the donors, to the clients who need the services of our organisations. The word servant in this context is not demeaning; it does not diminish our professional image. It does require us to ask ourselves at regular those penetrating questions: Am I doing my job right? Am I fulfilling my responsibility to the institution?"

These timeless words of Hank Rosso are a leadership invocation to fundraising professionals. While the relevance of servant leadership as a leadership paradigm for the fundraising professional is a separate but related conversation, the call to be "reflective in our service" talks to the importance of reflection in the carriage of fundraising leadership.

Dan Oestreich offers a succinct description of the reflective leadership task

- Understanding personal impact
- Authenticity
- Enter the unknown

If the simplicity of this insight calls for further expansion, Frank Staropoli, offers this more expansive view;

"Reflection, broadly defined here, is stepping back from the window and observing: noting what is happening, looking for patterns, and looking for meaning. It's a thought process, an emotional process, and an intuitive process all at once. Reflection as I use it here is more active than meditation or contemplation; and it is deeper and richer than "thinking about something". It is a way to capture meaning, clarity, and direction in life"

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Parlakian and Sebel specifically address reflective leadership, describing it as "the key to creating a relationship-based organisation. It is characterised by three important skills: self-awareness, careful observation, and flexible response"

In closing, themes that also touch on or talk to reflection include;

Self-reflection - allows for an increased awareness of problematic performance traits and the ability to develop solutions on how to adjust those aspects of your leadership style

Mindfulness - the important thing is to have some form of introspective practice that enables you to slow down your mind and reflect on what is important

Critical thinking - the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.

So there it is, the three Rs of fundraising leadership - Relevance, Relationships and Respect - in that order. And then three more Rs offered up for good measure - and completeness - Resilience, Respect and Reflection.

This is a small part of a bigger leadership conversation however in sharing these themes I can say each of them, alone and together, have served me well over many years. I hope they offer you something as well.

Good luck with your leadership journey.

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Nigel Harris MBA CFRE FFIA

Chief Executive Officer

Mater Foundation

South Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

[nigel.harris@mater.org.au](mailto:nigel.harris@mater.org.au)

+61 7 3163 8000

+61 7 407 628 605

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