



THE IMPORTANCE OF

Integrity in Fundraising

by Rachel Clevenger

Integrity in fundraising is about more than ensuring your show choir members are approaching the fundraising event with a seriousness of purpose and commitment to following through. Integrity in any fundraising event starts when you choose a fundraising company to align with your choir and your own reputation, thus making the right choice in a fundraising company is a crucial decision.

TEAMWORK

STRATEGY

GOALS

GROWTH





Trust as a Critical Component of Running a Successful Fundraiser

Carey Aron, VP of The Pasta Shoppe, shares how critical the component of trust is when running a successful fundraising event; trust comes only with a successful partnership. Aron notes that they have developed strong relationships over the years in order to support them throughout the entire fundraising process, because they recognize the directors and boosters or stretched for time and have a multitude of responsibilities.” Aron adds that they view their job as one to not only simplify the fundraiser, but to minimize the stresses on the booster, directors, and show choir members. They want to be the trusted “friendly voice on the other end of the phone.”

Additionally, in terms of keeping integrity in any fundraising partnership, Aron notes the value in backing up a “solid and seamless” system with a high-value product. She explains, “No one wants to open up the box and be disappointed in the size or quality of the item.”

Aron also suggests show choirs should partner with companies who make their products in America. She shares, “Supporting your fundraiser is also supporting hard working men and women and the communities where they live.” When you are selling products made in America, you are not only helping your group and your community; you are simultaneously supporting American workers.

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Honesty as the Cornerstone of the Fundraising Partnership

Debbie Hohman, founder and owner of School Spirit Coffee, Inc., suggests that when a show choir is choosing a fundraising program, they are best served by looking for quality products that can be gained at a fair price while, of course, offering the highest possible profit margin. Hohman notes, "The best way to achieve that is to choose a Direct Sale company that doesn't have regional Sales Representatives who take a margin of your profit."

Running a family-owned business gives Hohman the opportunity to regularly interact with her customers and share in their lives in meaningful ways, carrying over the same things that drive her interactions with her family members—honesty, caring for others, and integrity.

Hohman does suggest that boosters and directors may want to be wary when it comes to considering fundraisers that offer rewards for the student-sellers because, as motivating as that might be in the short-time, those rewards are coming out of the show choir's overall profit margins. She suggests

Jeff Ellenberger, founder and owner of Dutch Mill Bulbs, has watched the powerful relationships that develop among boosters and the fundraising companies they choose to align themselves with long-term. That energy created from a core of positive values builds momentum that inevitably leads to achieving whatever goals they have set for themselves, including the financial rewards resulting from any successful fundraiser.

creating internal rewards for participants, so the profit margin is untouched. She concludes, "If you do it right the first time, you won't create fundraising fatigue among your students or parents."

Longevity Establishes Integrity

Melissa Geatches with Country Meats, a family-owned and operated company established in the 70s by Jeff Geatches, believes integrity is a natural part of any small business started by family members. Though most companies claim they care deeply about customer satisfaction, the proof is found in

the daily interactions clients have with their fundraising partners. Words come cheap, but loyalty does not.

Geatches explains that this direct contact with their customers, and treating clients as part of the family, has been a principle of the company since it began. She knows that the "personal touch" offers an immediate response, where people feel heard and valued.

Geatches notes, "Customer satisfaction is what has kept our company going for over 40 years now. We feel that each and every customer is a part of our family." This

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“Supporting your fundraiser is also supporting hard working men and women and the communities where they live,” says Carey Aron, VP of The Pasta Shoppe. When you are selling products made in America, you are not only helping your group and your community; you are simultaneously supporting American workers.

devotion is why new customers immediately feel comfortable doing business with them, Geatches explains, because Country Meats “will always do what is right and take good care of them.” They want every customer to feel proud of the product they are selling for their fundraiser, confident in the knowledge their supporters will not be disappointed.

Geatches goes on to explain that in a company populated by family members, respect and integrity are a given; obviously, those principles apply across all of their interactions, whether with their employees of customers, and this offers a difference that people can both sense and see for themselves.

Fairness Breeds Loyalty While Creating Financial Success

Jeff Ellenberger, founder and owner of Dutch Mill Bulbs—a company that has been in business for over half a century now—is also focused on providing personal attention to each customer’s needs. He believes customer loyalty is not something to be taken for granted, but something that is earned by a company that runs their business in such a way that every customer feels appreciated, important, and confident they are doing business with a company that can be trusted.

As a family business, Ellenberger notes, the values inherent in a strong family dynamic

are the same values they bring to their company: honesty, fairness, and loyalty. He sees these qualities as integral to living and working with integrity.

Treating people with respect, he adds, leads to loyalty in a natural and organic way; furthermore, with his small business being like a second family, he has a personal connection to the employees that larger companies are unlikely to enjoy. Dutch Mill is also focused on being environmentally responsible and is careful to work only with reputable growers, those who share the same dedication to service and to quality.

Ellenberger—as the father of three boys who have all been active in a variety of school activities—has watched the powerful relationships that develop among boosters and the fundraising companies they choose to align themselves with long-term. That energy created from a core of positive values builds momentum that inevitably leads to achieving whatever goals they have set for themselves, including the financial rewards resulting from any successful fundraiser.

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Finally, Sarah Ellis of Priestler's Pecans is part of a family-owned company that has been around for over seven decades, making gourmet gift tins, pecan pieces, and candies.

They have a commitment to shipping the freshest, top-grade crop of pecans available, ensuring recipients will be delighted by the product, and choir members will be proud of what they have sold. They have a 100% Satisfaction Guarantee, in fact, to be certain no one is disappointed.

Ellis stresses the "importance of doing things the way they way they've always been done"—by hand in small batches. Ellis adds, "We are now into our fourth generation of employees and passing the torch on to ensure the next generation provides the same level of care presented in the beginning."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Rachel James Clevenger earned her B.A. and M.Ed. degrees from Mississippi College. After finishing her PhD in Composition and Rhetoric, she taught and served as the University Writing Center Director for Birmingham Southern College and University of Alabama at Birmingham. Most recently, she taught Business Communications at Samford University.



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