

Let's Not Forget about the Service Part of Advancement Services

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The current Advancement Services environment has been stagnating in its approach to Advancement Services, not exhibiting today's typical focus and concentration on *customer service*. If anything, I am observing advancement services programs shifting towards a financial management orientation – more interest in mechanics and transactional processing, and less interest in a core principle of Advancement Services, as paraphrased from the Association of Advancement Services Professionals (aasp) definition of Advancement Services:

Protect and advance the missions of their organizations *and the interests of those who support these missions*. These italicized words speak to the heart of a 2018 AS concentration – our donors (customers).

Of grave concern, to me, is watching advancement services units being decimated with large areas of responsibility shifting to the Business Office. Where this happens I frequently make two observations: Vice Presidents who do have the first idea of what a good advancement services program can add to the overall advancement program; Directors of advancement services who did not seek out a profession in advancement services but, rather, had advancement services thrust upon them.

In 1994, in my first-ever presentation to a group of fundraisers, I explained that the role of Advancement Services was:

- ▣ To process gifts
- ▣ To maintain biographical records
- ▣ To issue receipts
- ▣ To generate reports

Today, in a very similar presentation I paint a very different picture:

- ▣ To facilitate fund raising, gift processing, fund management, and stewardship.
- ▣ To effectively provide the backbone of the fund-raising enterprise.
- ▣ To make the fundraiser and institution look good by being the face, voice, and information source and deliverer to our donors, alumni, friends, and students.
- ▣ To keep administration officials out of trouble.
- ▣ To understand, and explain, all regulations governing fundraising and gift processing.
- ▣ To prepare the organization for a campaign.

I have highlighted the key customer service role; however, you can see many additional roles critical in a modern-day AS program. However, many of these are becoming increasingly absent in the current AS construct. It is critical to understand that these are the day-to-day responsibilities of a modern-day AS program.

Further, many institutions have allowed their AS program to stagnate, reflecting a proclivity in sticking to those original functions mentioned above of a quarter-century ago, rather than move into the modern era of advancement service. Perhaps this can be partly attributed to so many AS staff having been in essentially the same AS positions for 2+ decades and they don't know any better – either due to lack of professional development opportunities or AS leadership suffering the same fate or, worse, lacking the strategic and progressive service-oriented skills critical to donor acquisition and retention in today's highly competitive philanthropic landscape.

It is time for us to remember that we are called Advancement Services for a reason – the *services* we provide to our internal and external audiences.