

Yours for the Asking

An Indispensable Guide to
Fundraising and Management

Reynold Levy



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*For my wife, Elizabeth,
our children, Justin and Emily,
and my sister, Joyce:
You have given me all that an author
could possibly need—without my even asking.*

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ALSO BY REYNOLD LEVY

Nearing the Crossroads: Contending Approaches to American Foreign Policy

Give and Take: A Candid Account of Corporate Philanthropy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a book while working full time at a demanding post is a challenge. It offers a sense of immediacy and engagement to the reader as the subject is very current and preoccupies the author in his “day job.” It allows one to draw on real-life examples, to court controversy when necessary, and to compel reflection on professional practice.

Of course, writing this way also has its costs. Facing an unremitting deadline. Losing sleep. Forgoing vacations. Running the risk of not tempering the “here and now” enough with the “then and there.”

I write this book out of a conviction that too few chief executives offer their views and perspectives when in office and, for that matter, after they leave. One reason to do it now is the reality that the failure to act in the present may, in fact, doom a project entirely. The unwritten manuscript is the bane of the curious professional and the avid student.

To my knowledge, no chief executive of any major nonprofit has written about fundraising and its influence—on the institution, on the donor, and on the professional and volunteer solicitor. This gap in the literature is significant given the fact that some \$300 billion is now raised annually in America and for virtually any CEO an ability and willingness to raise funds has become a central requirement of his or her professional life.

What's more, I truly agree with Mahatma Gandhi that "the difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems." If the veritable army of this country's fundraisers performed their work more professionally, creatively, insistently, and resourcefully and if tens of thousands more volunteers were recruited to the task, the incremental funds raised could vastly strengthen our nation's problem-solving capabilities.

Cures for disease would be found more rapidly. The nation's educational performance at the primary and secondary school level would be improved more quickly. Utterly unnecessary deaths in our nation's hospitals from medical error would decline more swiftly. The doors to our colleges and universities would swing open wider to the working class and to the children of first-generation Americans.

The contribution of this nation's Third Sector to meeting such twenty-first-century challenges is constrained by a lack of resources. Acquiring them with a greater sense of urgency, of competency, and of creativity is a critical task. It can be accomplished, but only if the chief executive becomes personally engaged and catalyzes volunteers and professional staff with vision and by example.

My confidence about our collective ability to improve performance is rooted in respect for the qualities and accomplishments of today's leaders. They work hard and achieve much. But they can work smarter and accomplish much more. They number in the tens of thousands. Their ranks can grow exponentially. Those served by our nation's Third Sector deserve the very best we can be. "The fierce urgency of now" that drove Martin Luther King, Jr. is no small part of my inspiration.

To put pen to paper, motivation isn't enough. One needs supporters and friends.

No one has encouraged me to write more than Nessa Rapoport, a friend since my days at the 92nd Street Y, some 30 years ago, and herself an accomplished author of both fiction and nonfiction. Her gentle prodding serves as a kind of superego. When Nessa calls, she usually asks two questions: "What's on your mind?" and "Reynold, that sounds really

important, have you written it down?" *Yours for the Asking* is one answer to both questions.

Nessa, thank you. Thank you very much.

Gratitude needs also to be expressed to my volunteer colleagues who have served as role models or worked at my side to strengthen, principally, the International Rescue Committee and Lincoln Center. The chairs of each, John Whitehead and Frank Bennack, and before him Beverly Sills and Bruce Crawford, respectively, from whom I've learned much, as you will discover. David Rubenstein, the founder of the Carlyle Group and chairman of Lincoln Center's Capital Campaign Steering Committee and its most active members, Katherine Farley, Peter Malkin, Rita Hauser, Blair Effron, Renee Belfer, Roy Furman, Barbara Block, Richard DeScherer, Joel Ehrenkranz, Tom Renyi, and Steve Ross, among them.

They and their colleagues follow in a tradition of the extraordinary leadership of the chairs of Lincoln Center with whom I was privileged to work—Martin E. Segal, Bruce Crawford, Beverley Sills and Frank Bennack. Their distinguished service and that of Nat Leventhal, the president of Lincoln Center for some seventeen years, set a high standard for what it means to govern and manage a major public trust like Lincoln Center.

More generally, I'd also like to acknowledge the unselfish acts of dozens of relatively new trustees at both the IRC and Lincoln Center. I participated in recruiting a cadre of gifted civic leaders, many in their 30s, 40s, or early 50s. They choose to spend more time in the boardroom than in the country club or on the golf course, and they offer ample treasure to the institutions and causes they help govern.

At both institutions this fresh class of trustees supplemented the energy, determination, and generosity of veterans. They will also supply the next generation of board leadership, assuring much-needed continuity.

I shall refrain from naming names. All are on the public record. Some have become good and cherished friends. One and all, they have my admiration and respect. It remains a privilege to work at their sides and call them partners in a common cause.

Among the many professions that have benefited enormously from the entry of women into the workplace over recent decades is fundraising. I've been blessed by many development directors and fundraising staff with whom to work. Three stand out. Rebecca Rosow at the 92nd Street Y. Janet Harris at the IRC. And Tamar Podell at Lincoln Center. Each brought distinctive strengths to their outstanding work. Each recruited and motivated gifted colleagues and determined volunteers. All were fun to be around and to learn from. I feel fortunate to have worked with them.

It is not only the author who "sacrifices" to write a book while shouldering other responsibilities. Two of my associates at Lincoln Center sacrificed spare time and serenity as well.

Tom Dunn, my principal assistant, raised his professional game and took on assignments that would have cost me precious hours or shielded me from the nice but unnecessary phone calls, meetings, and the like. He preserved a modicum of space for me to write and a semblance of sanity in my professional life. He knows how much I value him and our association.

Kristy Geslain typed every word of this manuscript with patience, attention to detail, and grace under pressure for which I am extremely grateful. Her high standards are matched by an even temperament, a rare combination.

Julie Woolard assisted Kristy with humor and energy.

A very good friend, Ed Bligh, read a late draft of the book cover to cover. He caught many mistakes and infelicities. *Yours for the Asking* is the beneficiary of his keen eye and editorial pen. I'm glad I summoned the courage to ask for his help.

I'm also grateful to friends and colleagues who read a version of the manuscript and offered helpful commentary: Alan Batkin, Tom Brokaw, Indra Nooyi, Tamar Podell, Lesley Friedman Rosenthal, David Rubenstein, Dan Rubin, Betsy Vorce, and John Whitehead.

One reader deserves a special acknowledgment. Bart Friedman, a senior partner of the firm Cahill, Gordon & Reindel, is my best friend. He brought to *Yours for the Asking* an appreciation for this precious Third Sector of ours and fervent desire to see it flourish. He's given me

unstinting support in every important endeavor I have undertaken. I am blessed to have met him as a child and to have stayed in close touch ever since.

Of course, the team from John Wiley & Sons, headed by Susan McDermott, could not have been easier to work with or more encouraging. She and her colleagues are supportive resources any author would be privileged to have in their corner.

I'm also extremely pleased to record my thanks to those who helped create a fund for this book's dissemination. To John Ruskay and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, to Lance Lindblom and the Nathan Cummings Foundation, and to John Whitehead I offer a spirited expression of thanks.

My wife, Elizabeth, encouraged me to record my experience so that others might benefit. She is an extraordinary partner who shares my conviction about the importance of nonprofit institutions in America. She has spent much of her own professional life contributing to their vibrancy. This book is the beneficiary of her career, of her own careful review of the manuscript and of our life together.

I count myself a lucky guy.

Reynold Levy
June 2008

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reynold Levy is the president of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the largest and most consequential institution of its kind anywhere in the world.

In earlier professional incarnations, Dr. Levy served as the president and chief executive officer of the International Rescue Committee (1997–2002), the senior officer of AT&T in charge of government relations (1994–1996), president of the AT&T Foundation (1984–1996), executive director of the 92nd Street Y (1977–1984), and staff director of the Task Force on the New York City Fiscal Crisis (1975–1977).

A graduate of Hobart College, Dr. Levy holds a law degree from Columbia University and a PhD in government and foreign affairs from the University of Virginia. Dr. Levy is currently a member of the Board of Overseers of the International Rescue Committee, a trustee and chairman of the Executive Committee of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a board member of Third Way.

He has written extensively and spoken widely about philanthropy, the performing arts, humanitarian causes and issues, and the leadership and management of nonprofit institutions. Dr. Levy has been a senior lecturer at The Harvard Business School. He has also taught law, political science, and nonprofit administration at Columbia and New York universities and at the City University of New York.

Dr. Levy is the author of *Give and Take: A Candid Account of Corporate Philanthropy* (1999, Harvard Business School Press) and *Nearing the Crossroads: Contending Approaches to American Foreign Policy* (1975, Free Press of Macmillan). His speeches and essays have found their way into over a dozen books and anthologies and into leading newspapers. He frequently appears on radio and television.

Dr. Levy is married to Elizabeth A. Cooke. They have two children, Justin and Emily. All reside in New York City.

INTRODUCTION

Almost every American does it. In 2007, the population of the United States gave \$306 billion to charity. That sum represents 2.3 percent of the average American's disposable income. Two-thirds of all households contributed funds to nonprofit institutions. For each of the last five years, Americans donated more to their favorite organizations and causes than they saved for themselves. And of that total, corporations gave \$15.7 billion, or about 1 percent of their pretax income.¹

Giving is not a spontaneous act. People, corporations, and foundations donate funds largely because they are asked to do so.

It is a puzzle that while giving funds to nonprofit institutions is hardly unusual, the act of asking seems so universally disliked, misunderstood, and disdained. It is even more perplexing to discover that there is no must-read, must-own guide to raising funds, given the hundreds of thousands of Americans who struggle to solicit donations every day.

Yours for the Asking has been written for anyone who wishes to overcome the fear or simply the hesitation of asking friends and strangers for money. It is designed for those who wish to improve the effectiveness of their fundraising. It is motivated by the conviction that more charitable funds are available by orders of magnitude to prevent and cure disease, eliminate poverty, expand education, and relieve the misery of the