

Making the Transition From the Business World to the Nonprofit Development World

This week, Steve Delph, from Seattle's Union Gospel Mission, will discuss his transition and learnings from the business world to the nonprofit development world.

Introduction

Rob: This is an exciting day for me. One more day in the podcast series on [First Fruit Institute](#) about fundraising and giving and the communion of giving and receiving.

And I'm today with one of my best friends in this work, one of my oldest friends in life. He and his wife, who I've had the privilege of watching through a number of jobs.

But the most important is that he has been a pastor in a profession that wants you to be a salesman. And so I'm gonna introduce you to Steve Delph.

Steve is working for the [Union Rescue Mission in Seattle](#) right now in my experience and I'm excited to talk to Steve about this in my experience.

One of the best run ministries I've ever encountered either internationally or locally many years ago. [If you've read my book](#) you'd know I had worked at a rescue mission.

And so this is like a full circle conversation for myself and Steve. So let me say hi Steve.

Steve: Hi Rob, it's great.

Rob: Great to have you with us, thank you man. I really appreciate it. It's good to see your face because of COVID we haven't been able to hang out at all and this is my baseball going buddy, bye.

Steve: Yeah.

Rob: We've traveled a lot to a number of places around the world and done fundraising teaching. We've had some interesting experiences.

Steve: Well it's hard to think about Rob we've known each other over 40 years and we started in a small group together that we attended with you being a leader.

And from there went to church planting, to there went to a career at FedEx, to there went to a whole host of things that I would have never dreamed of then but has been really a journey of learning and a journey of exploration about what in the world is going on and God had a lot to inform me about, it was great.

Rob: Yeah, we've both been on a steep learning curve our entire life and just catching up a bit this morning before pressing the record button. It's been amazing, our two careers and how God has used two people, one that came out of the business world, one that came out of the business world.

And here we are sharing about how to build God's kingdom work here on earth through biblical fundraising and proper practices.

And so there's two topics that we're gonna cover today briefly with Steve. And then we'll come back and look at these plus a couple of others in depth.

But if you're a development officer or contemplating a career in development, the first thing we're gonna talk about is Steve's transition from the business world to the development world and how the business world informed what he was doing in the development world and how it didn't.

And then secondly, we're gonna fast forward today where he is working at this rescue mission which I mentioned earlier is one of the best one that I

know. And one of the aspects of that is they know how to measure the fruit on their trees. And what does that mean for fundraising?

This is going to be an interesting conversation if you're at all in the work of fundraising or just interested in what it's like on the other side of the desk.

So Steve, again welcome and let's get started.



The Business and Nonprofit Worlds Deploy the Same Principle

Rob: So Steve, how long have you actually been working with Christian ministries? When did you leave the business career and get started in this?

Steve: Well, it's funny you should say that because of this time of history, I've been in about the equal amount of time in ministry fundraising and in business 20, about 20 years in both.

Rob: And what was it like transitioning from business? Because I know your heart and I know how you operate that you have always had a deep passion for change and transformation and to promote the love of Christ.

I mean, one thing that I admire about Steve having been on the other side of the desk when he's pitching money, pitching grants for ministries that I admired. Steve has a pastoring heart.

And so how did you equate that heartbeat of your step desire to pastor which means look out for the best and equipped the people that you're working with not just look at them like a wallet or somebody that can help you achieve another aim such as make enough money so that you're bringing money into the ministry.

Just tell us about your transformation, how the business career helped you inform what you're doing in development work and what you had to leave behind and take on something new?

Steve: Well, Rob at first I would say that it didn't really like that delineated. I feel like when I first came into the nonprofit world from business I felt like there was a principle that I could use that would allow me to be successful and garner resources like selling.

But what I found was these lessons that I had learned from FedEx about really knowing the customer and really knowing what the customer needs and wants from some of the chief executives who went on to do great work and other big companies I didn't realize what I was learning in business was actually kingdom principle lessons.

So when I went into nonprofit and trying to raise money I think I initially started with this kind of what I would consider a worldly view of raising resources and trying to get the gift and trying to raise the money.

And what I soon realized was one, it wasn't very fulfilling and two, it wasn't true because what I failed to see is that the secular world and the sacred world are nonprofit, they're both owned by God.

And they're both actually deploying the same principles, we just seem to talk about them in different ways. So for instance, when I first started my first nonprofit job was to be a foundation person. And I started trying to raise money.

Rob: For our international viewers who may not be familiar with the American evangelical philanthropic scene which is quite a bit of the folks that pay attention this podcast sessions, just quickly describe what you meant with the shorthand, in the foundation world.

Steve: Yeah so there in the foundation world there are individuals, what we call principals who will take resources that they've earned in the business world or in their life or through inheritance or a number of other things.

And they will put those resources into an entity called a foundation. And there's a lot of reason people do that but it's a unique structure of which you would approach a kind of a system that has somebody that has a frontward face to the foundation that you would engage with and that person is somebody who is the gatekeeper of those resources.

And usually the foundation as a series of organizational structures within it that would require an offer to be made through a proposal of some sort, a document that would say this is what we want and where we want it to go and what we think it might achieve kind of like a business plan.

And what that does in a foundation, has to go through a board of decision makers people who were on the board that would decide where they think that is a good idea or something that they want to go forward with or something that they don't. So that's what a foundation is.

Rob: So you were just dumped right into the deep end of working in this somewhat sophisticated world of gatekeepers and decision-makers that we're gonna read proposals and you might never meet. They may not go to the field to see what you were doing. You really went into the hardest aspect of fundraising right from the start.

Steve: Well I did, but what was interesting is I had a coach my wife, who's been in this business for 40 years. And so I did have a mentor and somebody

who really helped me see that structure was built and how it was organized and how to navigate through that malaise of structure that I'm not familiar with.

Rob: Yeah Steve, I don't wanna put you down but I honestly should have done this interview with Kathy. She really knows and has a great way in this game.

And I can see both of you as you work together, Kathy is a fabulous cook and a fabulous leader in this kind of work and has blessed colleges and other ministries Fuller seminary. And it's just been, she's had a fabulous career and she's still working now with Seattle Pacific University and they are majoring on her work.

Steve: She's very gifted Rob,

Rob: Yes she is.

Steve: She's very gifted you were right.

Rob: And you, it's an enigma, just like it is with me how we ended with women like we did. It's a sign that God really loves us or He's called them to sacrifice. Sometimes I say, I think I was put on earth to teach my wife forgiveness.

Steve: Or patience.

Rob: Or patience.

Okay Steve, Kathy was mentoring you but basically in the approach, the relational approach, and you were carrying the common grace principles out of work that said, get to know your customer, get to know what they want, make sure you're listening to them and make sure you give them what they want at a fair price.

And that was those principles when focused on in the business world proved to be successful they always are.

And because they do come from the common grace principles that God put into the foundations of the earth of how we work and how we work together and how it's supposed to work as opposed to how we mess it up with our sin life and mistake prone existence in any case.



How to Develop a Nonprofit Fundraising Mindset

Rob: So, Steve let's move into what was it like once you started hitting your pace in the job? How did you develop?

One of the things that I've admired about you is the pastoring aspect. Now, there was even a point in your life where you and Kathy considered pastoring a church but God called you back into the mobilization work that you're involved in now both of you. But you carried over a pastoring heart into this work.

I've known donors that you've worked with, givers that you've worked with, that you and they have a deep friendship and ministry relationship and you've cultivated that every step of your career. And it's just a way of working.

And what I've noticed is you never press somebody but you're able to give them the opportunity give them the pathway to giving the money, but also help them understand where they'll best use their resources and if that's not with your ministry, you've been able to direct them to where they should go or how they should approach their funding.

And so you've become more than a fundraiser, you become a counselor, confidant and a friend these people.

So I know that comes naturally to the person that you are, but I wanna in switching out of the business career and into this how did you develop that aspect of your approach to fundraising and what does it meant to you through all these years?

Steve: Well, Rob, I think the business principles I learned we all learned when we worked for our companies we learned those values, but some of the things that I learned in church and the kingdom and the word of God was that we really are all looking for purpose and meaning and we're not looking for transactions.

And so I've always had this notion from early days of where we used to go to church with this notion of facilitating a discussion to find out where are you and where am I?

And where the donor comes in, is I've always wondered, where is their heart? Where is their heart and what is it that God is speaking to them about life?

And their, look everyone is looking to have to engage in something that's meaningful. And when you're talking about fundraising, I wanna have a discussion with somebody to learn where their heart and mind are.

And so this facilitation of just asking open-ended questions to get to the heart of where they are is what I would call the Matthew six principle, right?

Where is your heart? Because it's not that I'm looking for their treasure I'm actually looking for what brings them joy, what brings them purpose?

And I will try to identify in somebody where their heart is? Because I know if their heart is in what we're doing, and that can be aligned then I can make a transition and ask them for resources and will be natural for them to want participate in what God's already started in their heart and already placed in there.

And they just need somebody to help uncover or maybe they know and I just happened to come at the right time and we can talk about what they've already known and many cases, Rob they've known this for a long, long time, because many of them have done the same thing I have done in business.

And what I really have learned is that both business and ministry, why business matters to God? For people who are business people, why it matters to God?

Is because that's the way the world's supposed to run is through business, providing goods and services so that communities can thrive so that people can do meaningful work in the way they were created, in the way in which God has produced to them.

But in nonprofit, we tend to in this sacred place we tend to say, well, the business people are making money and then you give it to the ministry and then we'll do what's the right thing in God's kingdom, but that's not it.

God wants that person who's giving the money, as an act of part of the ministry, where they feel appropriate with their guilt, skills and settings.

So I try to discover what that is for them and then when I get their heart I find out where their heart is, and I say, yes there's a match to the ministry. Then I can say okay, where do I go from there?

Then I tried to say what is the project that gives the most meaning to them? Is it about women? It's about children, the foundation usually guideline but people have guidelines too in their heart. I really have a heart for the elderly. I

really have a heart for the poor. I really have a heart for the homeless, I really have a heart for whatever, right?

And my job is to find out where that heart is? And what project meets that heart and this is what I work really hard at, is trying to find, is this a match?

And if it's a match, it's easy to ask. 'Cause I'm already asking them for something they wanna do. So does that answer your question Rob?



Know Your Fundraising Priorities

Rob: Yeah it does. And so, but there's a method that you follow that has been part of this. And so I'd like to discuss a couple of aspects of that, of how you take on, let's say a fresh new appointment.

What's your approach to meeting a new giver particularly for those development officers, or future development officers out there in countries like Africa, where you've taught and worked to help develop money Eastern Europe, where you've taught and helped develop money, in the Middle East, where you've taught and helped people with money and of course across

Asia having been part of Partners International and part of just a number of different ministries.

But first I wanna ask you about the meeting with somebody like me from a foundation who was a gate keeper to the foundation First Fruit, I was executive director and my approach to the same meeting that you would come into to find out what I was thinking and what was close to my heart was to not let you know that not because I wanted to keep it a secret from you but because I wanted to know what was on your heart. What was really your major key objective?

I mean, we both knew you were fundraising so that wasn't the objective I was talking about. It was what's your biggest need and don't tailor that need to what I can give to, but I used to call it the negotiation 'cause it felt like a negotiation that we'd go back and forth.

And finally, if it all worked out, we come to this place of agreement and then the proposal would be drawn. And then we would move into the decision phase about that funding.

So what's that like when you're playing this kinda delicate dance, I wanna know what you're thinking? And they wanna know what's your priorities?

Steve: Well, Rob as you know foundations often, and we're talking about foundations here, but it's a little bit different with individuals because you have to have a little precursor to a foundation meeting 'cause foundations tend to have their objectives and their guidelines and their charters if you will.

They have those things stated it's in a document or a website or a place that you can find. So the best thing-

Rob: Time out right there, Steve, let me just make a comment on that. That's self preservation on the part of a foundation because if you don't know your own priorities at the foundation you're open to everything and that's one approach to the work.

But another approach is to narrow cast and decide, well, like at First Fruit we're gonna work with relief and development. We're gonna work with

evangelization and we're gonna work with the development of leaders in the developing world where they don't have a first world type economy.

Those, where are, you could drive a wide swath of stuff through that from everything from early childhood education to relief and development projects. But it was self preservation in one sense at the foundation level to just be able to help create or moderate expectations.

Steve: Right, screen out people of interest that doesn't match.

Rob: Yeah.

Steve: Where you wanna go.

Rob: And so you would meet that kind of thing with a more, well, here's what we do. Here's the things we're looking at.

These are the things we think you'd be interested in as opposed to when you're taking on a fresh, new potential major donor.

And that would be the second part of the question. What's that like? And is that really brings out the pastoring part?

Steve: Right. so, yeah. So let me, let me start there. So how I would approach a foundation or an individual would be, is to share with them what God has shown us specifically from what we see is the need.

So I would always frame what it is that we do in what we see as the problem. And the problem would always be it could be like the categories I gave earlier.

It could be homelessness. It could be evangelism in the third world. It could be the persecuted church. It could be a number of things, but I would try to approach that relationship by giving them the kind of the context of the problem.

And then I would talk about what we were uniquely called to do about that problem that came from the Lord that we felt that what God wanted us to do

was X, Y, and Z. And that's what I would communicate to somebody about what we do.

What often happens is in the programmatic side there are several things that seem to always gravitate to the top. Well, who runs your organization? What are their qualifications? How did they get into the Bishop position? What skills do they have?

And then you would talk about program people. What kinds of people are running the programs that you're running to meet the needs that you think God is calling you to do.

And then from there I would say that those leadership questions and program questions would lead into questions of curiosity by the foundation.

And I would start to explore with them is by their questions back and listening to what they said to me to find out where their heart is to say, well, is that something that you think is important to the foundation and try to get to try to get some understanding that if they felt like our organization had an alignment with them that we could move forward with a programmatic.

I'm gonna put a pause on that for a second do you mind?

I'm getting off track. I think where we started, I'm getting a little bit crossed over, cause you're you're trying to get to the pastoring piece, my heart and I'm kind of giving you a little bit more of the technical part.



Just as You Sell With Integrity, Minister With Integrity

Rob: Well, no, but this is exactly what I want people to hear from you, Steve. So it's, this is an art form. This is God at work. And so it actually does lead me to a couple of other questions on this point.

For example, when you're in this conversation with a new potential investor, and, you know you have to make payroll. I mean, there's a situation now at the ministry where you work, where human lives literally life and death on the streets of Seattle in the middle of a pandemic and the cold winter.

If you guys don't make payroll, you don't do your job. And for payroll to be made, you're out connecting with investors. And if they start to push back or just get cold or seem difficult the tendency I have in a situation like that or had in the past is to double up on my effort to try and box them into a decision.

It almost comes out of me naturally because you can get weak knees sitting across from somebody that can make payroll and is not wanting to. And you can try or at least I did, you can try and manipulate situation.

I never liked myself for it. And I've always admired you for being able to rise above it.

Steve: Right.

Rob: And but it's a pressure, isn't it?

Steve: It is a pressure. And I think Rob, the way I would say I approach this idea of being in front of somebody and trying to, if you will negotiate, where we have a common link in our ministry, if we identify that is I believe in, if you use a secular word selling, if you use that word, I think if you sell something you have to sell with integrity.

And I think if you're ministering, it's the same principle. You have to minister with integrity. And the integrity is this. The person who's giving away resources are philanthropic. They already have a heart to give away, right?

They're already interested in wanting to do something they're already deploying resources. All you're trying to do as a rep as a donor representative is you're trying to say, where are you deploying those resources now? And is it working? Is it accomplishing what you want to achieve from the vision God has given them?

Because he, I don't think Rob, there's a difference between a vision that a foundation or an individual or somebody giving to a charity, they have a vision from God, as well as you do as the mission.

And we have an ability to have a mission where they may not be able to actually do what we do but they have a heart to wanna do it but they're deploying resources already.

We're just trying to identify, are those the resource? Do you want to deploy the resources that you're already deploying into something that we're doing

that God's called us to do? Is that something that you feel was aligned with us?

Rob: And that now it comes down to communication, right?

Steve: Yes.

Rob: It's how well you're able to communicate the actual depth and reality of what you're doing to the point of giving confidence to a new donor.