

Chapter 1

**Civil Society, Yes;
Sheepskins on the Wall,
No—or, the Cons of Being Pro**

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

This is a book for people who hate these kinds of books. This book is also an act of reclamation. We aim to take back fundraising from the professionals and the degreed class, with their impenetrable jargon and their fetishized algorithms and their extortionate fees, and return it to its proper owners: Catholic-school moms, CEOs of smaller nonprofits, symphony orchestra development officers, idealistic think-tankers . . . the people who are the heart and soul of American civil society. Because civil society is not an exclusive club; it's a participatory democracy. It is citizenship in glorious action.

We don't like to bask in self-adulation, at least no more than any relatively normal person does. We don't like to toot our own horns, write our own press releases, or pen advertisements for ourselves. We don't want to come off as what sixth-grade girls used to call "conceited."

But, oh heck, let's.

Nah, we won't, but we do need to give you a brief and unadorned corporate resume in anticipatory response to a reader's inevitable question: "Just who are these guys, and why should I listen to them?"

We are Jeremy Beer and Jeff Cain. In 2009, we founded American Philanthropic, a consultancy that shuns secret formulas and magic bullets. Instead, AmPhil provides empirically based strategic guidance, essential tools, and practical training. Though the authors hold doctorates in Psychology and English Literature, respectively, please don't hold that against us: This book is academese-free, and not once will we use the words *instantiate* or *semiotics*.

Though our two names are blazoned on the cover, this really is a collaborative effort by all 30 or so of us at American Philanthropic, where Jeremy is now Principal Partner while Jeff toils as the CEO of CrossFit. Also pitching in for this effort was our friend Bill Kauffman, who is neither cross nor fit.

We and our colleagues have worked with hundreds of nonprofits over the last decade and helped them raise more

than oodles but fewer than gazillions of dollars—we won't insult your intelligence by hanging a precise number on it, the way many consultants do. We learned much of what follows from our clients. And we learned by trial and error, by instinct and empiricism, by following promising leads down dead-end roads and stumbling into unexpected revelations. Our intention is to jump the reader 10 years ahead of where we were when we launched American Philanthropic.

Simplify, simplify, simplify is a simplistic mantra, but if you do two things well, you will raise ample funds: (1) Find new donors, and (2) cultivate the donors you have, moving them up the giving ladder. That's it.

Well, it's a little more complicated than that. Likewise, you could say that offensive football consists of just two things—running and passing the ball—but success depends upon how well you execute a variety of plays, formations, and strategies. In the case of fundraising, your playbook primarily consists of direct mail, meetings, and foundation grants. Down, set, *but*. Perform these well and you'll raise more than enough money.

Fundraising isn't rocket science; in fact, the asocial father of rocket science, Robert Goddard, who was often distracted and unpleasant, would have been a lousy fundraiser, though the charismatic Werner von Braun might have done just fine if the space flight thing didn't work out for him.

What the world of fundraising *is*, though, is a banquet for those who feast on bad ideas.

In the early years of the company, we were continually surprised at our success. At first we thought that we were getting away with something, pulling the wool over our clients' eyes. After all, we had modest experience in fundraising and, at some level, felt that we were not qualified to teach others. We did in fact have a lot to learn. Over the years, though, and with the help of our wise clients and superb colleagues, we have found a way of doing things that works. We're still

learning on the fly; anyone who has stopped learning has started to atrophy, and the next stop is complacent mediocrity. But we now understand more completely where we stand in the bigger scheme of fundraising professionals and nonprofit consulting companies. To borrow a lyric from those puckish nonconformists of the first wave of British rock, the Kinks, we're not like everybody else.

Some of the conventional wisdom about fundraising is, we have found, self-serving nonsense spooned out by consultants who benefit from its tenets. When we launched American Philanthropic, we had no reason or incentive to dissent from this conventional wisdom. Its bland certitudes seemed unobjectionable, if uninspiring.

But the realities of guiding hundreds of small and medium nonprofits toward fiscal health jolted us into the realization that the bland certitudes of the conventional wisdom are based on gross misunderstandings of human nature and why people give money to nonprofits. In obsessing over numbers, outcomes, and its endlessly advertised “rationalism,” the fundraising establishment has often excluded the human factor from its calculations.

To the extent American Philanthropic has been successful, it is in part because we operate under no grand theory, no peremptory ideology. We take a simple nuts-and-bolts approach that we call, jokingly, DIRT. (Every scam artist and grifter who carries a business card identifying himself as a consultant traffics in acronyms; we chose ours with tongue only partly in cheek, since dirt is, quite literally, down to earth, and that's where we operate.)

We will dig into DIRT in the second chapter. For now, let's just point out that DIRT is what feeds the grassroots, and this humble agrarian metaphor fits the American Philanthropic philosophy. We stand, first and last, for civil society and for the idea that ordinary Americans—working in concert and motivated by love and fellowship and strong conviction

within the private associations, societies, and charitable organizations that give America its pith, its heart, its spirit—are more valuable than the entire run of top-down, heavily credentialed, remote-controlled nonprofit Godzillas.

Don't be cowed by the arcane—often inane—language of the professional fundraiser. You don't need a degree in fundraising or a certificate in philanthropy, although several of our best friends in the field are so credentialed. “Let every sheep keep its own skin,”¹ as Henry David Thoreau famously dismissed the acquisition of diplomas. Given that both of AmPhil's founders possess a PhD, we are not in full accord with the Thoreauvian sentiment, but we appreciate its implicit endorsement of native common sense and American autodidacticism over pedantic displays of formal learning.

If you are reasonably bright and interpersonally normal, you already have the necessary skills to raise money for your nonprofit. We'll give you the tools and tell you what you need to know. Follow our advice—get down in the DIRT—and you'll be successful. You'll also save yourself a lot of grief, not to mention money. (Doctorates in philanthropy don't come cheap!)

In the chapters that follow, we'll tell you how to find donors and how to keep them, how to plan for organizational success and how to achieve it, and how best to employ mailings, meetings, events, donor clubs, planned giving, foundation outreach, and more in furtherance of your nonprofit's goals.

We mentioned *civil society*, which has about it the whiff of a buzzword, an empty vocable of the sort used by hack political speechwriters.

It's not. Civil society is just a faintly pretentious name for America. For the essence of America is voluntary human collaboration and mutual aid. It is community, sodality, solidarity, pursued collectively but noncoercively.

Civil society is what makes America *America*. It is the Little League, the volunteer fire department, the quilting guild, the historical society, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the deacons of the Presbyterian Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church choir and the Candy Strippers and the town's concert band and the reggae circle and the Gilbert & Sullivan amateur troupe and the Village Green Preservation Society. And sure, a rung or two up the ladder it also includes your city's aquarium, museums, liberal arts college, and other well-heeled institutions.

Though diminished, service clubs remain the civic backbone of many communities: Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Zonta, Elks. They are part of the American legacy of voluntary associations. They undergird our communities; without them, we may as well be free-floating atoms, unconnected and wanton.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the keen-eyed French observer of the American scene during the Jacksonian era, marveled at the profusion of voluntary associations within the new republic:

Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they found hospitals, prisons, and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society. Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association.²

In our work with American Philanthropic we seek to recover, to reignite, that tradition. For in recent decades, cultural, economic, and governmental trends have eroded civil society, as the work of political scientist Robert D. Putnam has demonstrated. Only by bolstering “social connectedness,” concluded Putnam, can Americans restore “civic engagement and civic trust.”³

Always, *always*, we are seeking to strengthen civil society.



Philanthropy—which finances civil society—has survived recession, depression, and war, but it could face an even graver threat today in the form of professionalization.

“Nonprofit studies,” says Seton Hall professor Naomi Wish, is “one of the fastest growing fields in academia.”⁴ At last count, according to another Seton Hall professor, Roseanne M. Mirabella, 292 colleges and universities offer courses in nonprofit management, 168 schools of higher education have graduate degree programs with a concentration in the subject, and at the apex of this sheepskin pyramid sits Jeremy’s alma mater, Indiana University, which in 2003 became the first university to offer a course of study leading to a PhD in Philanthropic Studies. (The first doctorate was granted in 2008.)⁵

Working backward from the PhD, in 2010 IU instituted a Bachelor’s of Philanthropic Studies, and two years later the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropic Studies invested its Founding Dean. The department is peopled with men and women of goodwill, some of whom produce scholarly work of merit, and it graduates an earnest cadre of ambitious proto-professionals. Many go on to do laudable work in the nonprofit sector, but inevitably some alumni use the argot and secret handshakes of the philanthropic priesthood learned in school to keep the un-degreed in their place.

Concomitant with the growth of academic philanthropic programs has been the spread of organizations that certify those who jump through the proffered hoops. Typical is the Association of Fundraising Professionals, a New York City-based organization that, for a fee, will vouchsafe that the petitioner has earned the credential of:

- ◆ Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE), which is “a recognizable demonstration of your personal and professional achievement and commitment”;
- ◆ Advanced Certified Fund Raising Executive, which “signifie[s] mastery of professional standards in leadership, management and ethics, at an advanced level of practice”; in other words, the ACFRE is for those who regard the mere CRFE holder as a rank amateur, barely more sophisticated than the legless blind man selling pencils on the streetcorner; or a
- ◆ Diploma in Fundraising, for those who “know the fundamentals—but you need to take that next step Don’t just settle for fundraising as your job, make it your CAREER.”⁶

It’s too easy to mock the ridiculous humbuggery of this salesmanship, which reminds one of the back covers of old comic books (“Get rich selling seeds!”). Good and decent people enroll in these online and face-to-face courses because they want to get better at their jobs and climb the next rung of the office ladder.

But these are, at their root, pernicious. To the extent that these credentials privilege their holders in the pursuit of jobs, they act as barriers to entry.

The ultimate granter of the CFRE (Certified Fund Raising Executive) credential is CFRE International, which aspires to “se[t] standards in philanthropy” by handing out sheepskins to those who complete a written application and a written

examination, and agree to abide by a code of ethics and standards, all for a fee of \$875. On the off-chance that you flunk the test, a retake is just \$375. To keep replenishing the coffers, the CFRE holder must recertify every three years.

CFRE International is based in Alexandria, Virginia, securely within the Beltway that strangulates Washington, DC, and the republic whose capital she is. But don't get the idea that this is some provincial American outfit. The CFRE disabuses Internet visitors with this answer to the question, "Why does your website use spellings like 'organisation' and 'programme'?" *Because the CFRE is a global credential, CFRE International uses British spelling, which is the international standard.*⁷

The flight from amateurism, from a philanthropy rooted in love and communal values, has been hastened by the federal government, in particular that bane of every American's April, the Internal Revenue Service. The instrument of harassment is the IRS's Form 990, which must be filed by all tax-exempt organizations exceeding a gross receipts minimum of \$50,000. (In 2015, the most recent year for which statistics were available, about 295,000 charitable organizations filed Form 990s.)⁸

The Internal Revenue Service's revamped Form 990 goes far beyond merely ensuring tax compliance by nonprofits. They are required to report on their mission, leadership, activities, and finances over 16 separate schedules. The questions—Do you have a process for setting salaries? A written whistleblower policy? How is your conflict-of-interest policy monitored?—range from the nitpicking to the intrusive, but what they have in common is a complete lack of congressional mandate. Many are in no way germane to the IRS task of tax compliance and collection.

Besides the garden-variety harassment that is the *raison d'être* of the IRS, these niggling and irksome rules seem

designed to discourage amateurism in nonprofits. The Latinate root of *amateur*, recall, means love, a quality never in abundant quantity at the IRS. In recent years the word has come to denote one who undertakes an activity for no remuneration but the coin of love. An amateur need not be slapdash or oafish; Dorothy Hamill, Carl Lewis, Michael Phelps, and the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team were all amateurs. To despise amateurism, as short-sighted partisans of professionalism would have us do, is to condemn love and its often magnificent fruits.

The consequence of the IRS making its Form 990s ever denser and more confusing is to drive out amateurs. By requiring a specialized and sophisticated understanding of this gobbledygook—an advanced degree in application-filling-out—the tax agency is forcing more nonprofits to hire lawyers, tax accountants, and administrators. It is encouraging—nay, mandating—the bureaucratization of philanthropy. It is in effect waging furtive war on Tocquevillian associations.

The drive to professionalize fundraising and nonprofit management, to make it yet another field in which artificial barriers keep out the unwashed and benighted, from whom nothing is expected but deference, is consistent with the debilitating notion that an “expert” is anyone carrying a briefcase who isn’t from here.

In fact, the professionals usually miss the heart of the matter. They tend to fall for whatever the latest fad happens to be. Today’s conventional wisdom says that donors give out of *enlightened self-interest*. That is, they are driven by a desire for a good return on their investments. They are said to *prioritize*—and the use of that jargonish offense to the English language is usually a tipoff to the bureaucracy-blinkered vision of its user—*effectiveness* and *impact*. They look at the data, pore over the spreadsheets, furrow their brows analytically, and then they write out a check to

whichever organization has the best *metrics* (another jargony word, and redolent of the system of measurement rejected with such gusto by Americans in the 1970s).

If donors aren't motivated to give for these reasons, the professionals tell them, they ought to be! This assertion lies at the heart—or, rather, the core, as there is no heart—of the “Effective Altruism” movement. (The term demands to be capitalized: no minuscules for these fellas!) But more on this conceptual forest without trees in a minute.

The late great historian Christopher Lasch, a social critic of coruscating brilliance, wrote of the ways in which “professionalism” tends to grow not in “response to clearly defined social needs” but rather as an act of self-justification. In field after field, the professionalizers “adopted a deliberately mystifying jargon, ridiculed popular notions of self-help as backward and unscientific, and in this way created or intensified (not without opposition) a demand for their own services.”⁹

Ordinary men and women of sense and good intentions are incapable of mastering the complexities of modern institutions, goes the argument. Such mastery requires specialized education and expertise. In the interests of efficiency, the benighted many are advised to defer to the enlightened few. The result is a rational and effectual deployment of resources.

And if you believe that, we've got a Distinguished Chair in the Kim Kardashian School of Brain Surgery we'd like you to endow.

The actual result of creeping professionalization is the erection of barriers to entry, the discouragement of grassroots organizing, and the bureaucratization of charity.



To ensure the most efficacious possible allotment of resources, in recent years the professionals have devised ratings systems that reward those nonprofits whose practices track most closely with the dogmata of the professionals.

The rise of GuideStar and Charity Navigator—the leading umpires in the “empire of empiricism—the kingdom of counting, the sultanate of statistics,” in William Schambra’s alliteration—is understandable as a response to professionalization and giantism.¹⁰ If you’re directing your charitable dollars to huge impersonal institutions whose inner workings are inscrutable or even unknowable, then you might want to consult an almost equally huge and impersonal watchdog to ensure that you’re not sending your money to sleazy swindlers or profligate incompetents.

The human factor having been excised from the meganongprofits—with the same results as occur in the amputation of a heart—these large and abstract organizations must be analyzed scientifically, statistically, with an overlay of business argot that glazes the eyes and dulls the mind. The industry becomes obsessed with numbers and impact and designs ever more abstruse ways to measure these.

The idea behind GuideStar, in the words of former CEO Bob Ottenhoff, is to enable donors “to make better and more confident decisions, which ultimately will lead to more money going to high-performing organizations.”¹¹ Founded in 1994 in Williamsburg, Virginia, by Buzz Schmidt, GuideStar provides online information about 1.8 million IRS-registered nonprofits gleaned from their IRS Form 990s as well as other public documents. Most users access this information without cost; those wishing to delve even deeper using advanced searches pay fees typically in the range of \$2,000 per year.

The IRS, remarks GuideStar vice president of operations Debra Snider, is “our biggest provider and purchaser.”¹² This admission, or boast, belies GuideStar’s pretensions to being a revolutionary force, for revolutionaries seldom boast of symbiotic relationships with national tax collectors. Jesus ate with the publicans, but he didn’t trade intelligence with them.¹³

In November 2014, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced a three-year, \$3 million gift to GuideStar to assist

in the implementation of “its transformational strategic plan’s three pillars of data innovation, data collection and data distribution.” (Readers of mission statements are advised not to play drinking games triggered by variations on the word *transformative* lest they induce alcohol poisoning.) This grant was intended to help boost the number of nonprofits using GuideStar from 40,000 to 200,000, in accordance with the inevitably named document GuideStar 2020.¹⁴ The practical result, of course, will be the elevation, in the eyes of “efficient” donors, of nonprofits that can afford a battery of attorneys and adroit form-filler-outers.

The hubristic geeks of Silicon Valley, having enriched our lives with Facebook and Twitter and other inventions of Gutenbergian magnitude, are determined to modernize charity. They’re going to drag nonprofits into the twenty-first century, they crow, by designing better measurements of effectiveness.

David Bosworth, short-story writer, cultural critic, and author of the acclaimed *The Demise of Virtue in Virtual America*, has dubbed this obsession with measuring outcomes “quantiphilia.”¹⁵ Bosworth, a professor of English at the University of Washington and longtime resident of Seattle, has taken the measure of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation at close range and found it a nest of courtiers and flatterers, scholars-for-rent and “experts” whose expertise consists in reliably parroting the conventional wisdom on whatever subject is under study. The BMGF, to use its unwieldy acronym, scales new heights in the category of “billionaire donors with no local connections” who with cluelessly arrogant insouciance presume to instruct the locals in how better to organize their communities.

But humans are not machines, no matter how devoutly Bill Gates may wish it were so.

GuideStar’s chief rival, Charity Navigator, uses an algorithmically derived four-star rating system, à la Siskel and Ebert

(sans the wit of the latter), to grade nonprofits with annual revenues of over \$1 million. Of course the late Roger Ebert graded movies subjectively, drawing upon a lifetime of erudition as well as visceral reaction. His intention was not to routinize and standardize the making of movies. Charity Navigator, by contrast, is premised on the belief that nonprofits need to operate more like businesses.

As the invaluable William Schambra put it in a debate with Charity Navigator CEO Ken Berger:

Every organization grantmakers support now describes its programs in the rigorous logic of cause and effect, specifying that a “dosage” or “measure of exposure to its activities” will produce the desired effect—and submits statistical evidence that those dosages work; outlines a plan to collect such evidence in the future; and compiles a list of validating agencies that vouch for its work. And grantmakers require their grantees to “collect and publish feedback” from their primary constituents.

Long gone are the dark ages when grants might have supported some young, passionate activist who wanted to start a movement from scratch; some professional disenchanted with the established procedures, yearning to try a different but purely experimental approach; some cause that probably was never going to succeed, but was worth supporting nonetheless because it was simply just and right. All such grants would have been based on mere feelings, on hunches, on subjective moral or religious preferences. None of them could have specified the precise dosages needed to inch the arrow along from clearly understood cause to clearly predicted effect.¹⁶

Quantiphilia, certification, credentialism, professionalism: If these are not quite plagues on the world of philanthropy, they are certainly drags. They complicate and confound; they

dress what should be a straightforward endeavor in pompous empty verbiage and numerological cerecloths. They are relevant to this book only as negative examples, as lamentable features of the current landscape.

Don't let them distract you. Don't get lost in a forest of metrics. You have a better chance of successfully raising money if you follow the basics that we are laying out in this book.

Fundraising does require a store of basic knowledge, and like any craft your skills will improve with experience. But fundraising is not quantum physics. (We really should have a "Fundraising is not..." contest. It's also not orchid cultivation, Sanskrit translation, or a Nepalese vacation.) It doesn't require an advanced degree or an alphabet soup of letters behind one's name. Do the work, be honest, treat people fairly, be passionate, know your job, and you'll be just fine.

This is where the professionalization of the field has led so many astray. They begin to doubt their own instincts, to defer to self-proclaimed experts. They meet with credentialed fundraising consultants who charge them \$100,000 for a six-month-long series of charrettes and other exercises in navel-gazing. At the end of all this wool-gathering they receive an action plan that is impossible to implement. Despite a considerable investment in time and money, they actually become *worse* fundraisers.

At American Philanthropic, we believe in one-day meetings. We emphasize the practical; our goal is to enable you to succeed at what you are trying to do. Thus this book is a citizens' guide to practical fundraising.

We are in many respects outliers in the field. We are not knee-jerk contrarians but we don't run with the herd, especially when it's headed for a cliff. We know what works, we know why it works, and we refuse to be hoodwinked by charlatans and managerial-guru mountebanks, even when they have chains of honorific letters after their names.

(My colleagues and I have logged enough years in graduate school to know that just as the race is not always to the swift, nor is the granting of degrees.)



American Philanthropic offers periodic seminars in fundraising, and we've been asked on multiple occasions why we don't seek certification for these training sessions so that seminar attendees can receive credit toward the dreaded CFRE.

This is a good question. Why not seek certification? What's the harm in doing so? Certification would allow attendees to work toward credentials as professional fundraisers and, perhaps, attract more attendees to our training sessions. There is a corollary to this question: Why don't we require our own two dozen or so consultants to obtain fundraising credentials? As mentioned earlier, there are over 160 degree-granting institutions with programs in nonprofit management. Many large public charities now require fundraising certificates or nonprofit management degrees as a condition of employment. The trend in nonprofit management is toward professionalization and credentialism. So why don't we get on board? Why not become, and beget, members in good standing of the professional fundraiser class?

These questions get to the heart of why we are different. We have often said, only half in jest, that we are the homeschoolers of fundraising. One of the things that we have always admired about homeschoolers is their indifference and even hostility toward credentialism. Over the years, the professionalization and organization of teachers created steep barriers to entry. Mastery of a given field or occupation became less important than certification and licensing. As the historian of education Diane Ravitch writes, in the early twentieth century "relatively small departments of pedagogy expanded into undergraduate and graduate schools of education. These institutions developed numerous specializations,

such as school administration, educational psychology, educational sociology, and curriculum. Experts and professionals sought to create an education profession, which had its own preparation programs and its own technical language.”¹⁷ A century after the virus of credentialism entered the body politic, a majority of teachers today hold degrees in education rather than in the subject they are teaching.

Today, virtually no one teaches in public (or many private) schools without a teaching certificate. Are these teachers more qualified because of their certification than the teachers of several decades ago, who wandered the earth without teachers’ certificates? No. One problem with licensing and credentialing, whether we are talking about teachers or fundraisers, is that it professionally qualifies people who are good at licensing and credentialing—good test takers and classroom jockeys—and not necessarily those who are good at the occupation being credentialed. Examinations rarely test the actual skills needed to be proficient in the field. Indeed, licensing and credentialing exams are often written by insiders who were themselves good test takers but not necessarily good practitioners. As a result, credentialism creates a safe harbor for those who cannot actually do the occupation for which they are credentialed. It gives them license to be mediocre. In the case of teachers, we have built an elegant and vast machinery for credentialing that is at once formidable and hollow.

Homeschoolers care less about credentials—either for teachers or their own children—than they do true education. We say at American Philanthropic that we value the Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom. For our purposes in fundraising, a record of achievement is more important than a document testifying to hours sitting in a classroom.

This point bears repeating: Credentials create barriers to entry. This is a problem for those who believe in a Tocquevillian notion of American civil society. *Anyone, anywhere* is

qualified by virtue of being a citizen to raise funds in support of voluntary associations: churches, clubs, advocacy groups, co-ops, leagues, community centers, and so on. You don't need a credential to undertake acts of good citizenship!

There is an even darker side to this problem. The professionalization of fundraising coincides with a truly insidious move to discourage political and community involvement more broadly. For instance, in California, state laws now prohibit neighbors from collecting money to fight business interests in their communities or take on state government unless they file as Political Action Committees and, in some cases, register with the state as lobbyists. In other words, one must receive the permission of the state in order to fight against state policy. The aforementioned new IRS Form 990, which goes well beyond the statutory authority granted to the IRS by Congress, is invasive, paternalistic, and discourages voluntary associations.¹⁸

We further contend that the flourishing of graduate programs in philanthropy could create additional barriers and ultimately discourage participation in civil society by average citizens. Civil society should not be the province of only the well-regulated, certified, credentialed, or connected. And it should not be managed by the government. Civil society, properly understood, stands apart from both government and business as a prudent check on both. Our mission at American Philanthropic is to strengthen civil society. We can do that in part by taking down barriers to entry, not by creating or participating in them.

Do credentials create better fundraisers? If they did, that might be a compelling reason not only to seek affiliation with a credentialing organization but also to require it of ourselves. Many of us at American Philanthropic had considerable experience working with fundraising consultants prior to joining our current venture. Since launching our firm, we have become very familiar with other consultants in our field.

What is our verdict? Well, it is important to understand that our company was born out of a belief that most fundraising consulting is substandard and a good deal of it is fraudulent. With important exceptions (which is to say any of our consulting friends who happen to be reading this) our collective experience affirms this sentiment. Direct-mail vendors, for example, who charge their clients a retainer, creative, and per-unit fee, among other fees, are usually not acting in the best interest of their clients. But that fee structure is standard operating procedure and well within CFRE ethical guidelines. We don't do that.

We don't charge a per-unit fee on direct mail. Why? Because it would put us at odds with our clients' interests. The bulk of nonprofit fundraising "scandals" have to do with vendors exacting inordinate fees for their services. Certification has not stemmed these practices; it has instead created a façade of legitimacy that masks these unethical business strategies.

At American Philanthropic, we hire a lot of people who have zero fundraising experience. They lack MAs in fundraising, their achievement walls bear no certificates in Advanced Fundraising, and when they start with us they wouldn't know a house-file letter from a nail file.

It doesn't matter. They learn.

Professionalization entails the use of a specialized language: shibboleths and hieroglyphics that may be gibberish but that signal to others within the high priesthood that one is also an initiate, a member of the lodge. The buzzwords and mantras are like secret handshakes and passwords, but instead of gaining admission to the treehouse or the Masonic Temple one lands a job in the world of fundraising.

One of our former associates, Rachel Short, shares this experience with us:

A lot of nonprofit leaders ask us, "Will I receive CEUs [Continuing Education Units] or any credentials for attending American Philanthropic's development training

seminar?” I get the pleasure of sharing with prospective clients (and even current clients): “No, you will not receive CEUs or any form of credentials for attending our graduate-level seminar.” I explain to them our belief is that fundraising is not rocket science. It’s doing the small things well and consistently well over time. How are you acquiring new donors? How are you cultivating those donors (e.g., moving your donors up the giving ladder)? It’s amazing how many people I speak to while promoting our trainings and our services (at conferences, etc.) who say, “I have my CFRE. Do you?”

Just the other day, I met a woman who works for the American Bible Society in Philadelphia. We started talking about the nonprofit sector, and one of the first things she said to me was: “I just received my material for CFRE, and I’m about to start studying. I’ll definitely let you know how it goes!” I shared with her what we at American Philanthropic believe to be true: Credentials are not necessary to (1) become an effective fundraiser; or (2) build a successful fundraising program. I was not surprised when she responded like many of the people I’ve spoken to before—“Oh, that’s so refreshing to hear! I’ve been beating my head against the wall with various nonprofit leaders telling me that I needed to get my CFRE yesterday.” I’m not sure what she’s decided to do re: the CFRE—I’m sure she’s getting some pressure from her superiors to get “credentialed.” But, more often than not, our clients/training participants share with us that our approach to fundraising is “practical wisdom” they wished they learned a long time ago.

Okay, so we don’t give a toss for credentials. What does American Philanthropic look for when we hire new consultants? Let us first state emphatically, as it cannot be said often enough: We don’t care about fundraising credentials or even prior fundraising experience. In fact, we often frown upon both things. We primarily value liberally

educated, well-adjusted, practically minded people. We like consultants who can think on their feet; who recognize the need for systems and procedures, but who are not so blinded by best practices that they are unable to adapt, innovate, or change when new circumstances arise. As we say in our seminars, there is nothing mysterious about effective fundraising. It doesn't require special degrees or certifications. It's not an arcane priesthood with inscrutable rituals. Its methods are simple and easy to learn. It is more a matter of doing things consistently and consistently well over time than it is about any special body of knowledge.

Is there a body of knowledge that is helpful to know to become an effective fundraiser or to build a successful fundraising program? Yes. But it is far less than the volumes of fundraising books and degree-granting institutions would seem to indicate. American Philanthropic is practical. Ironically, the premium that we place on liberally educated fundraisers, practical knowledge, and hard-nosed effectiveness (doing what works) is at once more basic *and* more rigorous than the body of knowledge offered by the CFRE. Why would we submit to a lesser standard?

We hope this doesn't sound prideful. There are more than enough self-important blowhards out there in the fundraising world; it sure doesn't need any more. But American Philanthropic *is* different—the advice we give is not found in the typical airport-kiosk *Seven Easy Steps to Success* or *Management Secrets of Vlad the Impaler* book-products.

Now, contrarianism for its own sake is artificial and wearying. But when the conventional wisdom is so error-ridden, and its consequences actually pernicious, then it is the duty of every friend of truth to be the contrarian.

At American Philanthropic, we stand against such much-ballyhooed trends as Effective Altruism, outcome-based measurements, and philanthroglobalism. We see them not as refreshing new waves but turbid tsunamis that would

drown civil society. They also grossly misread people and why they give their money away—which is the subject of our next chapter.

ENDNOTES

1. Henry David Thoreau, in *Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Franklin Benjamin Sanborn (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 165.
2. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Severs and Francis, 1863), vol. 2, sec. 2, chap. 5, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/detoc/ch2_05.htm.
3. Robert D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 6, no. 1 (January 1995), <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/detoc/assoc/bowling.html>.
4. William A. Schambra, “The Professionalization of Charity?” *Philanthropy* (December, 1, 2003), <https://www.hudson.org/research/3121-the-professionalization-of-charity->.
5. “Nonprofit Management Education,” Seton Hall University Academic Server, accessed June 20, 2018, <http://academic.shu.edu/npo/>.
6. “Certification & Career Management,” Association of Fundraising Professionals, accessed June 20, 2018, <http://www.afpnet.org/Professional/CertificationList.cfm?navItemNumber=554>.
7. “FAQs,” *CFRE International*, accessed June 22, 2018, <http://www.cfre.org/about/faqs/>.
8. “Charitable & Exempt Organizations Statistics,” IRS, last modified January 12, 2018, <https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-charitable-and-exempt-organizations-statistics>.
9. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 228.
10. William A. Schambra, “Charity Navigator 3.0: The Empirical Empire’s Death Star?” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, April 5, 2013,

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2013/04/05/charity-navigator-3-0-the-empirical-empire-s-death-star/>.

11. Phil Walzer, "Williamsburg's GuideStar Pushes Quiet Revolution," *The Virginian-Pilot*, October 31, 2010, https://pilotonline.com/business/article_45ffbe97-44eb-5481-94b1-6970fc564940.html.
12. Walzer, "Williamsburg's GuideStar Pushes Quiet Revolution."
13. Walzer, "Williamsburg's GuideStar Pushes Quiet Revolution."
14. Mark Hrywna, "\$3 Million from Gates to GuideStar," *The NonProfit Times*, November 10, 2014, <http://www.thenonproffitimes.com/news-articles/3-million-gates-guidestar/>.
15. David Bosworth, *Conscientious Thinking: Making Sense in an Age of Idiot Savants* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017).
16. Schambra, "Charity Navigator 3.0."
17. Diane Ravitch, "A Brief History of Teacher Professionalism" (lecture, White House Conference on Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers, U.S. Department of Education), <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/tchrqual/learn/preparingteachersconference/ravitch.html>.
18. Also in California, the attorney general is seeking to require all tax-exempt organizations to disclose their donors to the state. Whatever its intent, this requirement's effect would be to make it possible to intimidate those who give money to unfashionable causes. Ironically, those subject to this sordid exercise in speech-squelching would also include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: ironic, because the California measure is flatly violative of the US Supreme Court's ruling in *NAACP v. Patterson* (1958), in which the justices unanimously agreed that the state of Alabama could not force the NAACP to disclose the names of its members and donors. "[C]ompelled disclosure of affiliation with groups engaged in advocacy may constitute [an] effective . . . restraint on freedom of association," declared Justice Harlan in his opinion.

Yet the anonymity promised today by Fidelity, Donors Trust, National Christian Foundation, and other advisory funds is not without its drawbacks, if not for benefactor then at least for beneficiary. We have a client, a faith organization, that receives a six-figure sum each year from an anonymous donor via one of those concealed-identity funds. This contribution, while greatly appreciated, constitutes over 15 percent of our client's annual budget. The mystery surrounding the identity of the donor is a real source of worry and consternation to the nonprofit's officers. What if the donor dies, or cuts them off? There is no way to cultivate this donor, to bring him or her into the life of the organization. There are no meetings to take, or friendly notes to jot, or hands to shake. Does that make less work for the president and development officer? Sure. But when you don't know where the money's coming from you don't know if or when the flow might just stop, precipitating a budgetary mess.

