



First Things First



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from the standing-desk of
David H. King | President & CEO

David King, President & CEO of Alexander Haas, has been named a participating member of the **Forbes NonProfit Council**. Forbes Nonprofit Council is an invitation-only organization for senior-level executives in successful nonprofit organizations. *The below article first appeared on the Council's website.*

5 Ways Perfection is Killing Your Fundraising Progress

Recently, I was given a piece of business advice that has stuck in my head: "Perfection is the enemy of progress."

This statement sounds odd at first, as many of us think of perfection as the goal. After all, each of us wants to be the best, right? Yet, as I roll it over in my head, I realize there is profound wisdom in that simple statement.

Because I have spent nearly 30 years as a nonprofit fundraising consultant, this statement got me thinking about how perfection sabotages the efforts of the people around me - those in nonprofit development roles. There are five ways that I see the pursuit of perfection hold clients back in their fundraising progress.

- 1. Perfection Consumes Time:** Time is one of the most valuable resources we have. Yet, I repeatedly see clients spending hours and hours going through a myriad of edits to their case statement, re-editing their own edits and striving for perfection. It's as if they believe getting the perfect words on paper will be the tipping point between their success and failure. While editing and proofreading are important, at some point you must put down the red editing pen, stop talking about it and start moving forward with your campaign.
- 2. Perfection Feeds Procrastination:** Another prevalent example of the cost of perfection is perpetual donor cultivation. This often manifests itself as the

development officer who never gets around to the solicitation of donors because they are always looking for the perfect time, the perfect project, the perfect team, the perfect economy, the perfect naming opportunity - the perfect whatever. The reality is, perfection rarely comes. So, a development officer waiting for the perfect set of circumstances to make an ask never makes the ask. Instead, they end up stuck working on a perpetual cycle of cultivation steps.

- 3. Perfection Forgets Fundamentals:** There are some very real opportunity costs associated with a development officer who's stuck in a cycle of seeking perfection. Most obvious is that, when they don't solicit the donor, the donor probably won't give a gift. This is a fundamental principle that development officers often lose sight of. The loss of contributed income to the organization is real when you're not actively engaged in soliciting donors.

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One of the challenges facing development leadership today is the retention of key staff members. Turnover in development is high. In fact, some would argue it is at an unprecedented high. A culture of numbers - dollars, donors, visits, solicitations, etc. - has become the norm and now seems to dominate many of the manager/staff interactions.

Technology has fostered and facilitated this philosophy, which tracks every possible activity value. In many ways, this has made our industry more disciplined - something that can be viewed as being positive. But there's a backlash brewing.

We frequently hear from high performing staff members saying their managers do not care to hear anything but statistics. These individuals, who were originally hired for their ability to close gifts and form strong and lasting relationships in addition to raising funds for the organization, are left wondering if their abilities really matter.



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**With appropriate stewardship for a donor’s gift,
you dramatically increase the likelihood that
the donor will make a gift next year.**

Dr. Arthur Criscillis, Managing Partner

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