Why is fundraising female?

Bruce Tait Associates recently published the results of a fascinating survey into fundraising salaries in Scotland and the results make interesting reading for everyone involved in recruiting fundraisers in Scotland. The main purpose of the survey was to come up with average salary levels for all the different types of fundraisers in Scotland and this results were most enlightening. But we also asked a serious of questions to try and find out more about who Scottish fundraisers are, where they came from, and how they feel about their organisations.

You can find all the results on our website (www.brucetaitassociates.com), but the one that really stood out for me was that 86% of Scottish fundraisers are women. What surprised me wasn't that women were in the majority in raising funds for Scottish causes. In my own fundraising career I was fairly unique as pretty much the only male fundraiser at the charities I worked for. But the big surprise was that this was so statistically common amongst all Scottish causes.

The question that follows this research is of course, why?

Survey after survey shows that women give more than men - 60% of women, compared to 50% of men give regularly. So is it simply that women are more inherently charitable than men and therefore are keener to work for good causes?

Or is it the comparative flexibility that the voluntary sector offers – with alternative structures of management, compressed working, better access to childcare etc, that attracts women?

It's true that the voluntary sector in general is less macho and more salary equitable than the business world and this probably accounts for the general gender imbalance in the sector as a whole. But if any part of the sector is target driven, status focused and generally "male" then its fundraising. Fundraising is the engine room of the sector, constantly pushed to raise more, get bigger donations, come up with the next big idea, and even here its women who are rolling up their sleeves and raising the funds needed to carry one the vital work of our Scottish causes.

Perhaps it is that charities are passively seeking to recruit women. As the sector with a remit that includes "righting wrongs", is there a trend to positively discriminate against men to re-dress the unfair employment practices that we read about in the commercial world? There certainly seems not be a "glass ceiling" in fundraising; the majority of our senior fundraisers are women.

In truth it's probably a combination of the above and I'm certainly not suggesting that this issue is holding fundraising back. We just need to look at it in respect of our donors. I learned long ago in fundraising that "people give to people" and "like gives to like". We also know that men and women respond differently to different kinds of appeal. Men prefer simple messages, bullet points, solution-focused appeals. Women give better to emotional, descriptive, empathetic approaches.

Faced with this, is there is an argument that there are more female donors simply because there are more female fundraisers, asking people to give in a way that is inherently female? That notion is well worth debating.

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