

## Paul A. Robell and the Robell Principles

He's been at it a long time, identifying folks who love the university but might learn to love it more, creating the stories that speak to their hidden goals and enthusiasms, encouraging their engagement and reengagement with students and programs, with faculty and sports, with arts and sciences. The results bear witness to the success of this mission, this unceasing commitment to bringing people with resources to the support of the university. I'm often asked what it takes to achieve these results, this level of expertise and effectiveness, and when I answer, I always channel Paul, and provide five major principles.

The First Robell Principle: You have to recognize that nothing happens unless you do something, and that there's always something to do. So work is the basic requirement. Not just work, of course, but constant, endless, unremitting, unstoppable work. Early morning, late at night, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, on line, in person, on the phone, but everywhere, work. It is in the doing that things get done, not in thinking about them, talking about them, or designing systems for them, but actually doing the work that produces the results, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not for fifteen years, but the results will come if the work gets done.

The Second Robell Principle: You have to shine light on donors and recipients, not on the work, the people, or the organization that gets them together. If the chief development officer is a famous person in the university, appears often in glossy photographs highlighting the institution's accomplishments, then we are not doing the right thing. The development officer is ubiquitous, constant, available, guiding, organizing, supporting, structuring the activities, but the focus, limelight, and attention belong to the donors, whose efforts make quality possible, and the recipients, whose work produces the quality that attracts the donors.

The Third Robell Principle: You have to be relentlessly organized and managed. But the trick is to hide much of the infrastructure from the donors and recipients. They do not need to know how, exactly, we found or qualified the donors, how we choose to visit this one or that, how we decided who should see whom and when. They do not need to know that there is a huge computer humming in the background filled with information on the effectiveness of everyone in the development organization, based on detailed reporting and data collection and management. They do not need to know that good development organizations are among the most performance driven enterprises of the university with some of the best individual productivity data available. The donors and recipients see the parties and events; they find things done so well they do not even notice them. There is always someone who looks out for their needs, their concerns, and their interests related to the university, whether from afar or on a campus visit. No donor is ever left standing alone at the doorway or at the party, for the development machine has planned ahead, seen to the details, and knows what is required to create the place the donor wants to be.

The Fourth Robell Principle: You have to acquire empathy, the capacity to understand what another dreams, feels, fears, and appreciates. This empathy allows us to guide the donor to the project that at once fulfills an institutional need and satisfies a donor desire. Through the empathetic understanding of donors, their relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and university, we find just the right frame for the donor's generosity. The validation comes when the donors, long after the gift, tell us that the giving was one of the most enjoyable moments of their lives.

The Fifth Robell Principle: You have to care about the people. These universities, for all their charm and history and for all the effort we spend on creating an institutional mystique, only have the soul of the people who live in them and who support them. The donors and others, whose efforts give the university whatever success it has, respond most to those who genuinely care about others. The development professional is in a difficult place here because everyone knows the conversation is about the gift. It is not exactly a sale, but it looks a lot like a transaction. The best development people not only act like they care about people, they actually care about them. As a consequence of their empathy, they understand the individual triumphs and tragedies of their donor's lives, they connect with them whether the gift materializes or not, they remain connected to them after the gift is delivered and no further benefit to the institution or the scorekeeping of development remains. They help when they can, they talk whenever it is possible, and they remind us all of the value of gifts past as well as of those yet to come.

Like many others of Paul's long list of development graduates, I have logged many hours doing whatever it was he told me to do. Throughout, I complained endlessly about the hours, the events, and all the rest that go with the development process, and he, with that relentless charm that ignored all my irrelevancies, keep us on task and taught me what it means to do that mission right. Like so many others, in the process of educating me, Paul became my friend. Not just for the time of work and achievement, but well beyond any time of professional utility. We are an inconstant clan, we academics, building and dissolving alliances and friendships based on the needs and opportunities of particular times and places. While Paul Robell is surely the premier academic development professional in America, I appreciate him even more for his caring friendship over the time and distance of our lives.

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