
In her own words: "A hard worker who is adamant about the high quality of production and cares about working relationships."

Jill Cannon's friends earmarked a career for her just after she graduated from university. "I had friends involved in fundraising at Queen's, and they always said I'd be perfect for the job because I'm outgoing and talk easily with people. Of course, it seemed an odd choice at the time — after all, I was in Phys. Ed.!"

Now, with four years of professional fundraising on her résumé, she really enjoys her chosen career. "I love getting people excited about an idea. Seeing a project through from start to finish, especially when it involves big financial gifts translating into scholarships, bursaries and refurbished buildings, is wonderful. It's very satisfying."

Almost from the start, her university studies seemed like a step toward something other than a career in Physical Education. She came to Queen's in 1990 with the idea of specializing in sports psychology but later changed her focus to exercise physiology. "I remember being surrounded by the best students, the best professors and a great collegial environment that gave me a lot of confidence in myself."

Meanwhile, she was busy inadvertently polishing the skills she would use as fundraiser. Along with her studies, she served as a public relations

representative for the Arts and Science Undergraduate Society, volunteered as an elementary school tutor and worked part-time at two off-campus pubs. In the end, she graduated with valuable life skills. "I knew a lot about time management, presentation and problem-solving, and how to work productively on teams and by myself. I learned that hard work pays off."

She started a Master's degree in exercise physiology but almost immediately realized that it wasn't the right fit for her. Soon after, she began job shadowing a former classmate who was the coordinator of the Centre for Canada-Asia Business Relations at Queen's.

"I knew her job was up for grabs, but I needed to check it out. I wanted to make the right decision after making the wrong decision about doing the Master's degree. It's important to talk to people who are actually doing a particular job."

"You have to be willing to call people and ask for advice or information on a position or project. If people around you aren't aware of your goals, it's very difficult to make progress. However, it's also important not to let others take on your problems. The worst advice I ever received from a co-worker was 'Let me take care of it.'"

As the coordinator of the Centre for Canada-Asia Business Relations, Jill initiated, organized and executed special events and conferences; she also acted as

a liaison with government sponsors and managed 30 volunteers. But she took particular pleasure in securing corporate sponsorship from institutions such as Hongkong Bank of Canada and Canadian Business Magazine. “I loved talking to people and getting them excited about things like student exchanges with Taiwanese universities. I liked seeing hard work result in something concrete.”

After a year, realizing the limited potential of her job, Jill made an easy segue into the world of professional fundraising. She “cold called” a contact at the University of Toronto and ended up

doing a three-year stint in a variety of fundraising roles, including Special Projects Officer, Annual Fund Development Officer and Associate Manager of the Annual Fund Programs. “I was

exposed to the biggest fundraising campaign in Canada ever, for any institution — \$1 billion.” Her various duties included managing telefundraising and corporate matching-gift programs; creating objectives, strategies and materials for the university’s Annual Fund; developing web sites; and managing other employees. Every project demanded solid research, writing, presentation and time management skills.

“I really honed my skills, and picked up some good lessons in diplomacy. You have to keep a lot of people happy. There were many projects that provided me with different challenges, and the chance to work with all kinds of people. Fundraising isn’t a profession tied to a specific degree.”

She also discovered that coordinating the business of annual giving required “the sheer skill of bringing the job back down to the personal level.” It was a tall order at the University of Toronto, where she sometimes felt like “a tadpole in the ocean.” In May 2001, she jumped at the chance to be “a bigger fish in a smaller pond,” accepting the position of Manager of Leadership Gifts for The Bishop Strachan School (BSS) in Toronto. At the private school she cultivates, solicits and stewards gifts of \$50,000 or more. “Now I actually meet the kids who benefit from bursaries or scholarships set up by donors.”

“The important thing is to ask yourself what kind of life you want when you’re 40, 50 and 60 years old. Not enough people ask themselves that question. Another thing to consider: If you wait around for something to happen, it likely won’t.”

Jill happily explodes some myths about the field of fundraising. “Yes, the hours can be long, but I’ve scaled back to a 40 to 50-hour week, and the pay is better now. Career magazines are describing fundraising

as an up-and-coming profession. Education, health, the environment — all those areas need fundraisers. There could be work for you out front interacting with people, developing policy or managing a database.”

She notes, however, that professional fundraisers tend to share a philanthropic streak. “In this job, you have to totally support the causes you believe in. You have to be a donor yourself. “

“Fundraiser or not, the important thing is to ask yourself what kind of life you want when you’re 40, 50 and 60 years old. Not enough people ask themselves that question. Another thing to consider: If you wait around for something to happen it likely won’t.”❖