The Best Job Ever

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Whether we are consultants who work at home or employees in large fundraising departments, many of us feel like we work alone. But how alone are we really when the online communities seem to be ever-expanding? Are those connections real and if so, why do we all still feel so alone?

The Grants Professional Association (GPA) has over 1,600 members and those are just the people who can afford the annual dues. I know from the turnover in my own chapter that dues, at any level, can be prohibitive for the self-employed. So let's say that even a third of us are paying dues at any given time, that's at least 4,800 people employed in the grants profession. Then there's the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) with its 30,000 or so members, some of whom are also devoted to grants. And don't forget CharityChannel’s professional online groups. None of that counts the grant writers, solicitors, or fundraisers who, for one reason or another, choose not to be a part of any professional organization.

There are literally thousands of people in our profession and yet I keep hearing about how alone we feel. There was a big conversation on one of the (too) many LinkedIn groups I'm in about people desperately wanting to get together for coffee. This was weeks ago and I've yet to see anyone propose a date. The thread was titled, grant writers in X city - Unite! Unite against what? Who is oppressing us? If you're that desperate for coffee, make some. If you're that desperate for company, leave your home/office. I like my job because I enjoy working alone. Of course I've felt alone and misunderstood, that's why I joined a GPA chapter. Every time I'm with GPA folks, either chapter or national, I feel like sighing, "Ahh, my people" because everyone 'gets it'. I say grants.gov and everyone groans with me. Seriously, join a GPA chapter and revel in the camaraderie.

Grant writers are always the only ones. We all support each other but you will always be working alone. Remember, that's one of the beauties of it. If you are more comfortable in a group than alone or more comfortable talking than writing, consider switching to major gifts, salaries are higher there anyway. People call the grant writer when they need help; we are fixers. It's a supporting role. We get the money but it's not ours, I am not the project director and I don't get to spend the money either professionally or personally.

If you are just starting in this profession, don't make the mistake of thinking that you'll be leading vast group projects whereby you will be the head writer of a well-functioning, committed, compassionate group of people who never forget the mission of the organization and who always give you the necessary data days before you need it.

We get paid to be unsung heroes – all of the work, none of the credit. So what? Embrace
it. Know what you’re getting into before you take on a new client/project/employer. We're doing Gods work (or mission-based fundraising if you prefer) and we get paid.

How much togetherness do we really need anyway? I'm in twenty-five or so LinkedIn groups, all of which are dedicated to grants. Holy overlap. If I see one more thread about getting paid on commission – the issues and the ethics, I will retreat into my home office forever.

Maybe we're not really lonely, maybe we're just looking for something to complain about. After all, we're under appreciated, over worked, under paid, and misunderstood. We work under pressure, have to fight our own program staff to get information, wrestle with finance people to get a straight answer on what fringe rate to use, and cope with the grants.gov 'help' desk. I get it, I feel your pain. I live that life. There are many days when I drink coffee only until it's late enough to switch to tequila.

There is strength in numbers. I've heard some rumblings from people unhappy with GPA national and/or its chapters. So fix it. Join a chapter and step into a leadership role. I guarantee you collaborative projects with energetic people. If there's not one near you, create one or come up with an alternative. If you have gotten to the point where you are desperate enough to suggest coffee with strangers, at least set up the day and time.

In our needs sections, we don't bring up a need we aren’t proposing to address. So I propose that we all stop complaining about how lonely and isolated we feel until we’re willing to follow up with a solution. Then we’ll all agree that we have the best jobs ever.