

# In practice

*Real organisations, real challenges*

## Home Fundraising

# "We are accountable for everyone"

*Home Fundraising is bucking the subcontracting trend with a unique team ethos that puts people at the heart of business*

**D**ominic had a judo match yesterday – he's a black belt – and we were worried he might turn up with a black eye." Visible injuries aren't most press officers' top concerns when *People Management* turns up for an interview, but Dominic Will (left in picture) and Neil Hope, joint managing directors of Home Fundraising, aren't your typical business leaders. Will took an early interest in the fundraising world, helping his father organise collections for Mencap as a child, and went on to hold several professional fundraising posts in the 1990s. But Hope took a more unusual route into the sector. After

selling media advertising, the long-hours culture had taken its toll and, at the age of 21, he joined a Buddhist monastery for nearly five years. Various stints as a boxing sparring partner and session band player followed, before Hope embarked on a career in fundraising.

Home Fundraising was born in 2002 when mutual friends suggested Will and Hope set up a new kind of professional fundraising organisation. "When we did our planning, the organisation was never going to be just about the business model," says Will. "One of our USPs is that we run a large field force, but they are all our people. We employ them directly and are accountable for recruiting,

training and developing all of them. In the fundraising world – and probably in the commercial sector, too – that's pretty much unheard of."

With a current staff of 1,500 across the UK – many of whom work outside the office, going from house to house recruiting donors for the charities they represent – and an estimated 20,000 people employed over the past 13 years, Home Fundraising needed to put employee support and development at the heart of its structure.

"It's a tough environment to work in, and there is a high turnover of staff in their first few weeks," says Will. "We don't trade on saying 'you're going to work for Oxfam or Cancer Research'. After you've been knocking on doors for a few hours, it's cold and raining and you've been rejected, you need more than that. If you make it all about the charity, it's not sustainable. Or if you make it all about the money, then we become a very different kind of company."

"We offer that unifying centre for people," adds Hope, who is also a mindfulness practitioner and has studied psychotherapy. "So people have somewhere they can come back to, where they feel safe but challenged, inspired but also related to. They go out, have an experience and come back home – hence the name."

The foundation of this environment is a leadership development model,

co-created by Will and Hope, that recognises individuals and groups have basic needs that must be listened to and met, by individuals or their leaders, for them to reach their full potential.

It takes as its central premise five unifying principles that connect universal values – such as honesty, empathy and compassion – to the team and individual. "Groups should always operate from these universal values," says Hope. "If you're a leader of a group, part of what that means is acting with honesty, kindness and open-heartedness." Hope rejects the importance of the sorts of cultural values many organisations invest time and money building, saying these "distort groups and shut people out".

The duo believe these unifying principles reflect needs that become more urgent at different life stages. "For instance, when we're young we focus on doing," says Hope. "Whereas the need for a sense of purpose manifests itself later on in life. All these principles affect how the individual is able to run a group, so it's vital that our leaders work on those principles in themselves."

The universal principles are the "motor" of the organisation, says Hope. "They have life in them. And they become more visible when you're a leader, so we expect our leaders to internalise and model them." Alongside traditional classroom-based and online training courses, much emphasis is placed on peer mentoring and coaching. "As people get more senior,

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there are more people to point out which values they are and aren't modelling," says Hope. "The guys who have been with us eight or nine years are more

into working in this way, and more into learning, than they were when they started."

Will and Hope's unwavering belief in the universal principles underpins every aspect of the organisation's strategy, opening up opportunities for the five-strong HR team to approach people challenges from unusual angles. "If we interview 10 people for a fundraiser role, maybe one or two will be natural communicators and can do the job," says Will. "But we don't want to discount the other eight. We believe in developing people and bringing out that potential."

And while technical competency is a key part of Home's training focus, "what we really teach you isn't about fundraising or payroll, it's about reinforcing your skills and helping you to understand the effect you have on the [group] dynamic, on your relationship with the individual you're dealing with and how you can change that – by changing your awareness of what's going on, and building certain principles into your work", says Hope.

In a claim that will surprise most leaders, Hope says "the business model is almost supplementary to us. What's important are the values and principles people internalise, and the development they go through so they can reach their potential. We found a couple of our managers working in chip shops – now they oversee a team of 100 staff who turn over £3 million a year."

Home Fundraising's ability to develop its employees into ethical, compassionate and supportive leaders will only become more critical to the organisation's long-term success, they claim. "If all of those 1,500 people aren't able to be successful and do well, then there's no company," says Will. "There's no fallback for us – there's nothing we can automate," adds Hope. "Everything is human. If we don't get that right, we've got nothing."