



Client Profile: Amelia Nieto, Historical Centre Foundation

There is a lot to be said for controlling your own destiny, being your own boss, charting your own path.

Then, there's reality. And, the reality is, when you're the Executive Director of a nonprofit organization - and you're its only staff member - being your own boss can suddenly become very isolating.

For Amelia "Amy" Nieto, CFRE, Executive Director of the [Historical Centre Foundation](#) (HCF), 2010 was a turning point, and a time to call in reinforcements. "We were in a transition time," Amy recalls. "Fr. David Garcia had been reassigned, and the new rector, Very Rev. Tony Vilano, wasn't very well known in our community."

HCF started as a fundraising arm for the capital campaign to renovate San Fernando Cathedral, but has transitioned into an organization that raises funds for the Cathedral's maintenance, as well as management of its ministries throughout the community. Without a dedicated Development Officer on staff, Amy found she needed someone with a fresh perspective.

"I felt it was important to talk to another development professional," Amy said. "I needed someone to ask, 'Am I on the right path? Am I moving in the right direction? Am I crazy? What do you think about this?'" Amy called on the coaching expertise of Kathy MacNaughton to be that sounding board.

In addition to listening to Amy and providing her with feedback, Kathy also reminded her about the importance of building relationships within the community. "Coaching has enhanced the way we do business, by going back to the basics, and personalizing things," Amy said.

HCF has a multi-pronged approach to meeting its fundraising goals: grants, annual appeals, special events and a gala organized every other year. But, noting that grants can dry up, the annual fund becomes more crucial to sustaining the organization.

Shortly after her coaching sessions started, Amy put her renewed relationship-building strategy into effect.

At Christmas each year, Amy sends a Christmas ornament to major donors as a way of thanking them for their support. In years past, the gift has been accompanied by a form letter. This year, she replaced the form letter with a thoughtful, hand-written note that she and Fr. Tony crafted.

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"It took two days, but after they were all sent out, we started getting thank you cards and emails," Amy said.

Following up on the success of that outreach, Fr. Tony has implemented similar acts of thoughtfulness for the volunteers, deacons, acolytes and others who serve in the Cathedral ministries.

"It's time consuming, but you don't know how far that goes, what that means to somebody," Amy said. "You're not on their radar until you reach out, then they reciprocate; they make a similar gesture. We need to be the leader, we need to make the first move."