



Demonstrating our Impact on Partners & Investees - 2010

What's so special about SVP?

Sometimes the biggest things come in the smallest packages. And, a force of nature can lie behind a sweet, caring personality. When you meet Mary Cobb, you see a smiling woman with a kind heart and dancing eyes. After you get to know her, you see the will of steel and intelligence she brings to the world around her.

Mary had been working as a Development Director in Boulder County for many years when she learned about Social Venture Partners (SVP) and its innovative model for building capacity in non-profits and philanthropists. She was excited about the opportunity to develop the skills, professionalism and success of other local non-profits, especially wanting to work with the people behind the mission. Shortly after joining SVP a perfect chance to have an impact came her way. Mary learned that a new investee, Intercambio de Comunidades, needed to grow their fundraising efforts in order to catch up with the amazing evolution of their program and services. According to founder, Lee Shainis, Intercambio enjoyed widespread community support through volunteers, media, and general recognition and they were quickly growing the number of clients as well as the geographic area served. However, services had outpaced financial support. Lee puts it mildly, "We needed to raise more money."

Intercambio realized it needed help from folks with real experience to develop fundraising systems, build new sources of income, and develop donors. Mary was tasked with consulting for Intercambio to build an effective fundraising program.

First off, this young non-profit needed to hire a new Development Director. Mary offered to help run the search process but quickly discovered that the roles of the Executive Director and Development Director were unclear. She recognized it would be difficult to hire the right person and give them a chance to be successful without more clarity. So, typical of Mary, she jumped in head-first and helped Intercambio refine appropriate job descriptions. Lee expounds, "The development person and I were both sharing fundraising updates with the board but neither one of us was responsible for engaging the Board in fundraising." With Mary's guidance, a job description was written that made the Development Director the primary Board liaison to fundraising. It outlined what outcomes s/he was expected to meet in terms of Board involvement in fundraising. As a result, Intercambio saw a significant improvement in Board member fundraising success.

After crafting the job descriptions, Mary really brought her experience to bear, developing strong interview questions, participating in interviews, and bringing up considerations that Intercambio hadn't identified, such as organizational skills. Mary was excited when a promising woman, Jenna Saldana, was hired as Development Director.

Now Intercambio had a staff member in place, but Mary knew from experience that developing a strong fundraising program was going to take time and skill. There was a glint in her eye as she offered to coach Jenna over the long haul. Remember that will-of-steel I mentioned earlier, well, that's when Mary's 'will-of-steel' came out to play. She met with

Jenna religiously, talked her through strategy and planning, coached her on building relationships, taught her solid technique, and encouraged Jenna to try different approaches until they could identify what worked with Intercambio's donors. Jenna especially remembers the way Mary helped her completely revolutionize their annual appeal letter. With Mary's guidance, Jenna researched the demographics of donors and prospects for the first time, tailored letters to each subset of supporters, used mail merges to personalize specific requests for an increase in giving, and began using bulk mail rates and a mail house. Jenna says, "Mary taught me that I didn't have to do things the way we always had. I learned all the basics of a successful appeal and we saw a change in donations, with donors upgrading their gift size." In fact, one woman (Cathy) who was included in the new prospect letters not only gave to Intercambio for the first time, she also became an invaluable volunteer and eventually began working as the office manager. Mary watched with a happy heart as Jenna developed her own vision for her role and the impact she could have within Intercambio.

Mary's biggest moment of joy came more than a year after she began volunteering with Intercambio as an SVP Partner. She and Jenna were meeting for their regular coaching session the day after Intercambio had tried a new individual donor event. For this event, donors were called by board members and asked to attend an Intercambio language class at a local middle school. After introductions, everyone observed the class for a while and then Lee and Jenna debriefed with the donors. This was the first time many donors saw their money in action; they now felt connected to the impact of their contribution. Talking to Mary that day, Jenna was overflowing with excitement, sharing this amazing event and how donors had responded. Mary could hear how Jenna had integrated all the things she'd learned from Mary and realized that they had both succeeded. At the end of the coaching session, Mary told Jenna, "That's it. You've graduated! You're ready to be an SVP Partner now!" Jenna was doing a great job and Intercambio had a strong fundraising program in place. In fact, Intercambio's income increased by more than 60% in two years and has continued to grow since that time, providing the non-profit with the money it needs to continue offering an award-winning program in Boulder County and beyond.

According to Mary, this is what's so special about SVP. We give time and money. Our intensive, free consulting services help non-profits grow and increase their abilities to work better. One woman can leverage her impact exponentially. You can imagine how Mary's eyes dance when she tells this story.