

It Takes a Village:

Are You Getting These 6 Perspectives
for Your Exhibition?



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Many exhibition development teams are made up of curators and content specialists, museum leadership, and designers (3D designers, graphic designers, and sometimes in-house fabricators). On occasion, department heads or board members join some of the project meetings.

Rarely are the folks on the front line heavily involved in the numerous design and content decisions that they're going to have to live with. These are the museum staff members who work most closely with the exhibits, the facility, and the visitors.

Don't close the door on those with the most to offer. Here are 6 museum team members who should be consulted during every new and renovated exhibition project.

No. 1 | Floor Staff & Docents

It's a museum's Boots on the Ground who understand, better than anyone else, how visitors behave. Volunteers, docents, and other floor staff not only watch visitors, but interact with them, answering questions, helping them with directions, and listening to what they're excited about...or confused by. If you're looking to update exhibit content or improve wayfinding, talk to staff members who "live" in the exhibits to find out what guests really do and need.





No. 2 | Education Department

Like Floor Staff, members of a museum's Education Department also enjoy one-on-one interactions with visitors, doing demonstrations and leading programs. They also have relationships with local teachers, and understand the needs and nuances of field trips; from the insanity of lunch bags and winter coats to connections between the exhibition content and the State's core curriculum requirements. They're an invaluable resource during exhibition planning.

No. 3 | Museum Operations

Once an exhibition design is completed and open to the public, someone still needs to take care of it and work around it. A museum's operations and facility team is the group behind the curtain and it's imperative to get their feedback at numerous points during an exhibit design process. They'll share input regarding material durability, power and data access, cleaning concerns, ceiling access, life safety, and more.

No. 4 | Exhibit IT Specialists

It seems like everyone wants the latest technology in their exhibits. AR, VR, apps, gesture recognition experiences, multi-touch tables, etc. But who's going to maintain it? And who'll repair it when it goes down?... because down it will go, at some point. Before a major investment in hi-tech exhibits, get input from the museum IT Department or in-house exhibit technicians. Find out if the technology being considered is something the tech team is familiar with, and get them involved in planning how to take care of it for the long run.



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No. 5 | Development Staff

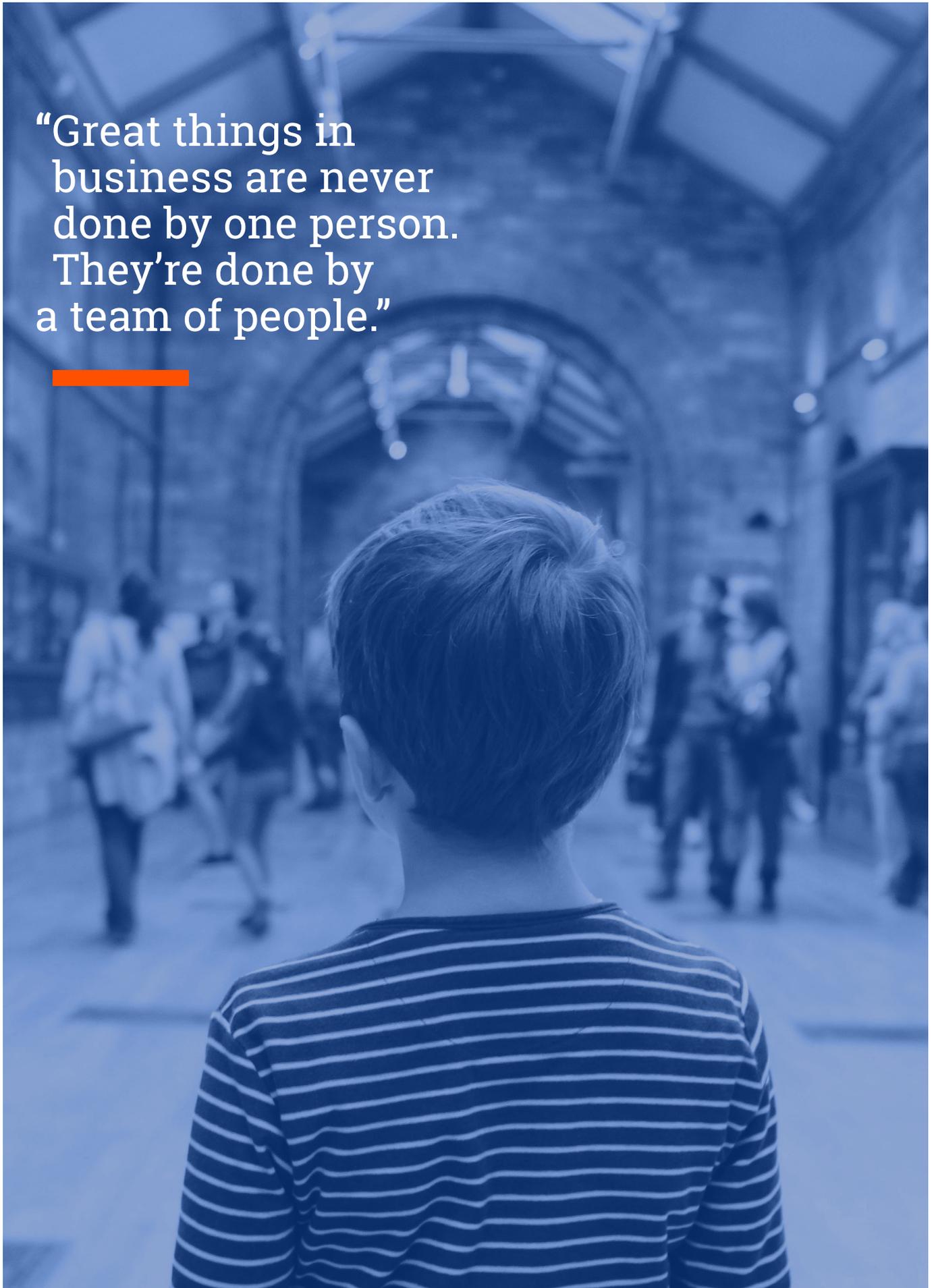
Oddly, in many museums, it's the person or team raising money for new exhibitions that is most often kept at arm's length from the creative design process. Getting the input of individuals from the development team goes deeper than just hearing, "I have a potential donor that wants x-y-or-z." They're also aware of trends and content highlights that donors and board members are inspired by. Ask them!

No. 6 | Visitors

Of the many quotes Steve Jobs is known for, one of his most famous is, "People don't know what they want until you show it to them." That may be true for consumer electronics, but for the most part, museum-goers know exactly what they want, which is why they'll choose one museum over another. Ask your audience what they'd like to see, learn, and experience more of. Ask them what they think about your exhibits. At every stage of exhibition design, talk to your visitors.

Steve Jobs also once said, "Great things in business are never done by one person. They're done by a team of people." And this certainly applies to the creation of successful museum exhibitions. Because most museums are made up of staff with wildly different expertise, backgrounds, and viewpoints, it makes sense to invite them to the table so that the curators and creative team – and the exhibition – benefit from their valuable perspectives. ●

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