

Depth Perception

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A Little Black Swan Thinking

The book *The Black Swan: the Impact of the Highly Improbable* by Nassim Nicholas Taleb is too complicated, thought-provoking, assumption shattering and wonderful to summarize here. So let us simply say if you have financial responsibilities for your organization—either generating or expending it—the book is a must read. Combine what Mr. Taleb shows us with Ron Mattocks' book *The Zone of Insolvency* and you are equipped as ever to face the realities of a new economy—both its known and unknown forces.

Here is just one way that Black Swan * awareness can affect support-raising for religious and non-profit organizations. Traditionally, these organizations focus on major donor development and *moves management*, trying to get current donors to become major donors, and in more recent years placing extensive resources into getting even more from the current set of major donors. A significant number of major donors disappeared, however, as the old economy disintegrated significant amounts of asset—an unexpected event for many--what Mr. Taleb would call a *Black Swan*. The result? Major donors who once were may never be so again. Even more, evidence is increasing that current donors might not ever become major donors (their wealth disintegrated too), and might not ever intend to be. Their lack of intention to become major donors is precisely why they give occasionally or monthly and resist being *move managed* up the donor pyramid in spite of repeated invitations.

As we live forward into the new economy, which increasingly looks like the old, old economy, we return to a time when the major donor is a surprise, a windfall, an unexpected blessing, rather than a make or break expectation for the budget. And, if we embrace what can be learned from Mr Taleb's work on Black Swans, we learn that our next major donors are likely to be persons we do not yet know, or know well, rather than people found among the current crop of supporters. We might not even meet them until the moment they become major donors.

In the words of Scripture: "*Cast your bread upon the waters . . .*"

-mark I vincent

**Black Swan* comes from history. Europeans believed all swans were white as a matter of fact. That is, until black swans were discovered in Australia. Then what was believed to be fact was utterly destroyed.

David Bell will instruct on the Biblical Foundations for Development at the Engstrom Institute S
Leader Summit.

Registrations remain open for this 28 Sept – 1 Oct event in Denver, CO.



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