



How to Alienate a Good Donor

Here's what to do—and what not to do—to assure continued support from donors.

BY HARLAN DALLUGE

As a person involved in fundraising for many years, I keep files packed with development articles, brochures, sample letters, and such. One file, labeled "Ain't it awful!" is filled with a collection of the worst things I've seen in the fundraising field.

Recently I added a whole page of notes to the "ain't it awful" file when my role reversed and I donated a \$10,000 boat (fully appraised as required by law) to a charitable group in San Francisco. Let me enumerate the mistakes—donor killing mistakes—made by this nonprofit organization.

What Are the Most Deadly Mistakes?

First, I never received a thank-you letter or any information about the charity as a follow up to my contribution. The initial paperwork, including the appraisal and 501(c)(3) documentation, was arranged through a boat dealer working in cooperation with the charity—but I never received anything further in appreciation or to encourage further support.

Second, when my tax return was being prepared in February, I found the charity had failed to include the required IRS form 8283. I called the charity twice, requesting the form. The charity promised to send it, but never did. When I called a third time, personnel from the charity told me to pick up the form myself at an IRS office and take it to the charity's administrative office. That, they said, was the only way to beat the April 15 deadline. Great! A 45-mile trip, each way, from my home!

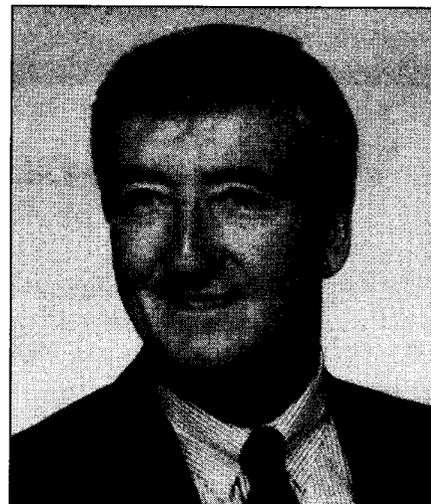
With April 15 approaching, I did as the charity suggested, picked up the form, and took it to the charity's office. I explained the requirement, and the administrator agreed to complete the form. As he did so, I commented on my interest in the organization's work. His response was, "Yes, we do good work." There's the third big error—no elaboration, no success stories, no literature, no tour, no offer of a cup of coffee and a chat... and still no thank-you for the \$10,000 boat.

By contrast, I recall the day three elderly women arrived unannounced at

Bar-None Boys' Ranch, a Minnesota facility for disturbed youth where I served as executive director. The women were toting boxes of odds and ends left over from their garage sale. They knew nothing about our organization except that we served kids—kids who might like their garage sale items.

We served the women coffee and explained our work. We took them on a 15-minute tour and shared a variety of "successful boy" stories. As they left, we gave them a packet of brochures and newsletters. At least three times, we thanked them for their thoughtfulness.

The next day, we sent the women a warm thank-you letter. We told them that we had given their donations—books, flower pots, an old radio, and a suitcase—to the boys. We explained how much we appreciate material gifts, as they help "stretch" tight budgets. We added the women's names to our mailing list so that they would receive our newsletter.



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Connect your success stories to the donors' investment in your services.

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Soup's On

Healthy, easy gourmet soups make a great fundraising project. Buy a case of 24 bags of crockpot-ready soups, and make a minimum of 33% to 40% profit with each bag your group sells. You can mix and match from a variety of all-natural, low-fat soups, such as Moroccan lentil, African split pea and rice, Portuguese black bean, all-American bean, Egyptian fava bean, and French white bean and garlic. For details, contact Culinary Concepts, 13344 Lincoln, Grand Haven, Michigan 49417 (800-506-7824).

Three months later, one of the women called to ask, "If we gave you \$35,000, how would you use it?" We had an answer ready for just such a question: We wanted to build a chapel, and projected costs were \$150,000. We told them we would use their \$35,000 as a challenge toward raising the balance. They made the donation, and a beautiful Boys' Ranch Chapel was built.

What Should You Do When Donors Visit?

How you manage donors' visits is crucial, as the above examples make clear. A visit is a rare opportunity to solidify support. Handled badly, however, it can bring your relationship with a donor to a halt.

First of all, personalize each donor's visit as much as possible. If the visit has been planned, prepare yourself by studying the donor's giving history, special interests, recent gifts, family situation, and previous involvement with your organization. If donors drop in unannounced, stall for a few minutes so

that you can look up this information in your database or files.

Knowing your donors' giving history offers you the opportunity to work in some expressions of appreciation for their support. Connect your success stories to the donors' investment in your services. Doing so will demonstrate to donors the value of their involvement.

Let your donors know you are pleased to have them visit. Smile, make eye contact, call them by name, and express an interest in them as people. Establish a relaxed, open, friendly atmosphere. In a non-threatening way, find out why they came by and what questions they might like answered. Show your willingness to share information about your organization. Be sure to communicate your enthusiasm for your organization's mission.

During the visit, invite donors to tour your facility. You can tailor the tour so that you don't disrupt program activities. Also, take time to sit with your visitors away from disruptions, share refreshments, and explain the purpose and workings of the organization. Be prepared with human interest stories related to your organization. Explain why your service is so valuable to the community and to society.

Have available a list of potential projects and their costs, in case the donor expresses an interest in helping in some way. Project costs should vary from a few dollars all the way to the price of a new building. If the donor would like to help with an activity costing about \$500, for example, and you have some ventures in mind that cost about that much, your chances of getting the contribution are very good.

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**Prepare yourself by studying
the donor's giving history.**

Handled badly, a visit can bring your relationship with a donor to a halt.

Listen carefully to donors' comments. Learn as much as you can (in subtle and diplomatic ways) about their family situation, value systems, interests, hobbies, background, experience, education, and the like. Take a few minutes after the visit to write down what you learned about the donors and place that information in your donor file system for future reference.

Be sure to resolve all the donors' questions. If you don't have an answer, offer to do some research and to call or write with the response.

Depending on donors' reasons for visiting and their previous experiences with your organization, you might provide a packet of materials about your services. Some nonprofits also have small thank-you items on hand to give to visiting donors. These might include, for example, a mug with your organization's logo or an inexpensive clock shaped like the world and saying, "A World of Thanks."

When donors drop in for a visit, find a way to fire them up with enthusiasm for your organization. Turn them on, not off! ■

Selected References

- Bergan, Helen, *Where the Money Is*.
Faust, Paula J., *An Introduction to Fundraising: The Newcomer's Guide to Development*.
Howe, Fisher, *The Board Member's Guide to Fund Raising*.
Muehrcke, Jill, *Are You Sitting on a Gold Mine? Fundraising Self-Assessment Guide*.
Muehrcke, Jill, ed., *Fundraising and Resource Development, Leadership Series*.
Myers, Walter R., "Why People Give: Pride of Association," *Nonprofit World*, May-June 1990.
New, Anne L., *Raise More Money for Your Nonprofit Organization*.
Nichols, Judith, *Changing Demographics: Fund Raising in the 1990s*.
Seltzer, Michael, *Securing Your Organization's Future*.
Simsarian, Astrid, "Ten Key Steps to Continued Contributions," *Nonprofit World*, January-February 1995.

Strand, Bobbie J. and Susan Hunt, *Prospect Research: A How-to Guide*.

Audio and Video Cassettes

- Cultivating & Soliciting Major Donors*. Video tape. Presented by Henry Goldstein.
Corporate Solicitation. Video tape.
John Carver on Board Governance. Two video tapes. Presented by John Carver.
Special Events Fundraising. Video tape.
Strategic Leadership. Four audio tapes. Presented by John Carver.

The books and cassettes listed above are available through the Society For Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center. For ordering information, see the Society's *Resource Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800-424-7367).

Fundraising Software Resources

- Chronicle Guide to Grants*, 1255 23rd Street, N.W., Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20037 (202-466-1000).
Donor Development, Samuelson Computer Services Company, 350 South Schmale Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188 (708-668-1598).
Donor Perfect fundraising software, SoftWare, 540 Pennsylvania Avenue, 2nd Floor, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania 19117 (800-220-8111).
Enterprise fundraising software, Access International, 432 Columbia Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02141 (phone 617-494-0066; fax 617-494-8404).
Executive Data Fundraising, Executive Data Systems, Inc., 1640 Powers Ferry Road, Building 27, Marietta, Georgia 30067 (phone 800-272-3374; fax 770-955-3374).
Federal Money Retriever, access to all Federal Assistance Programs, IDI Magic Technologies Corporation, available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' *Resource Center Catalog*, 6314 Odana Road, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (phone 800-424-7367; fax 608-274-9978).
Fund-Master 7.0 fundraising software, Master Software Corporation, 5975 Castle Creek Parkway N. Drive, Suite 300, Indianapolis, Indiana 46250 (phone 800-950-2999; fax 317-849-5280).
Manage!, Omega C.G. Limited, 377 East Butterfield Road, Suite 975, Lombard, Illinois 60148 (phone 800-443-3481; fax 708-969-8690).
ParaGon planned giving software, Blackbaud, 4401 Belle Oaks Drive, Charleston, South Carolina 29405-8530 (phone 800-443-9441, Ext. 307 or 803-740-5400; fax 803-740-5410).
Planned Giving Manager (PGM) software, PG Calc Incorporated, 129 Mount Auburn Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138 (phone 617-497-4970; fax 617-497-4974).
The Raiser's Edge fundraising software, Blackbaud, 4401 Belle Oaks Drive, Charleston, South Carolina 29405-8530 (phone 800-443-9441,

Ext. 307 or 803-740-5400; fax 803-740-5410).

Special Events software, Lifeline Information Services, 1776 Woodbine Place, Oceanside, California 92054.

TARGET 1 Fundraising software, Echo Management Group, 1620 Main Street, Center Conway, New Hampshire 03813 (phone 800-635-8209; fax 603-447-2037).

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