



The Top 55 Fundraising Excuses

And strategies to overcome them.

BY JOHN PAUL

1. The competition is too tough
2. All the good volunteers are taken
3. The economy is bad
4. The economy is good
5. The weather was bad
6. The weather was good
7. Goals were set too high
8. Goals were set too low
9. My dog ate the plan
10. Volunteers won't follow the book
11. Staff won't follow the book
12. We shouldn't have followed the book
13. The materials are outdated
14. The date was bad
15. The time was bad
16. The day of the week was bad
17. Our vendor let us down
18. We charged too much
19. We didn't charge enough
20. The stock market is up
21. The stock market is down
22. The stock market is steady
23. Not enough visibility
24. We're different here
25. They're different there
26. We can't continue to have double digit growth
27. We have tapped out
28. No more growth potential
29. El Niño
30. La Niña
31. Staff turnover is the problem
32. The route was bad
33. You're not comparing apples to apples
34. You're comparing apples to oranges
35. Can't ask them for money because they are already providing: food, teams, space, (fill in the blank)
36. Just wait till next year
37. Now—we have the right chairperson
38. Didn't have the right chairperson
39. Can't depend on them
40. Their cause is better
41. Bad time of year
42. People don't like to walk, run, dance, ride, swim anymore
43. The software didn't work
44. The hardware didn't work
45. We didn't have a plan
46. We had a plan—but, it was bad
47. No one listens to me
48. Why did you listen to me?
49. Donors are tired of giving
50. Volunteers are tired of volunteering
51. Didn't get any cooperation from (fill in the blank)
52. Not enough publicity
53. No money, but everyone had fun
54. No money, but we had lots of visibility
55. And on and on and on...

Overcoming Excuses

- **Keep asking “Why is this excuse being made?”**

Why is it a problem?
Why do you think it happened?
Why didn't it work?
Why do you feel that way?
Why do you believe X?
Why do you only break even?

- **Ask permission up front.**

Confirm with volunteer and staff leadership at the beginning of the activity that it's okay to say, “We have a problem,” as soon as problems arise.

- **Challenge assumptions.**

Base decisions on facts, not assumptions. What facts have caused your team to believe that:
“People don't have time to participate”
“People are tired of walking”
“We can't ask them again, they just got a solicitation in the mail”
“We can't recruit the very best volunteers”
“We can't charge that much to participate”
“We're not able to compete with...”

- **Ask, “Do we want to settle for second best?”**

Do you believe in what you are doing? If you do, you can't settle for anything less than the best.

It's okay to say,
“We have a problem.”



CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Telephone Fundraising Really Does Work

If you dial your phone 225 times per month, you will talk to 45 people and make 25 appointments that are kept by 20 people, and 10 of those people will support you with gifts of \$200 a month. Yes, it's hard work, but it really does work. The important thing is to set appointments with potential donors. Few people will call to set up an appointment with you; you are the ones who needs to ask for their time.

Are You Using the Right Fundraising Vehicles?

A *Harvard Business Review* study ranked the effectiveness of communication in the following order: (1) one-on-one, (2) small group discussion, (3) large group discussion, (4) telephone, (5) handwritten letter, (6) typed letter, (7) mass-mailed letter, (8) newsletter, (9) brochure, (10) news item, (11) advertisement, (12) handout. Be sure your fundraising plan includes the most effective communication vehicles. Your main focus should be one-on-one visits. Remember, too, that only 7 percent of communication is done through words. Ninety-three percent comes through expression, gestures, tone, and body language. A personal, face-to-face meeting provides "total" communication.

Add a P.S.

Fundraising letters get 1.5 times more positive response if they contain a P.S. A handwritten P.S. is more effective than a typed one. And, remember, you multiply your letter's effectiveness manyfold if you follow it up with a phone call. For details on these and other ideas for raising support, see *People Raising*, Moody Press, 820 N. LaSalle Blvd., Chicago, Illinois 60610 (800-660-6624 or 312-329-2108).

• Remember: The mission is too important for excuses.

The mission is everything.

• Do you believe it can be done?

Henry Ford said it best: "If you believe you can, you can, and if you believe you can't, you can't."

• Build relationships.

Think of all events as acquisition opportunities. What are you doing throughout the year to build and

enhance the relationship? What would be needed to turn event donors and participants into major gift donors?

• Assume success.

Talk about *when* you succeed—not *if* you succeed. Show this list of excuses to committee members before you begin to plan. Discuss how you can avoid having to use any of them.

• Have a plan and work it.

Develop a realistic plan and follow it (modifying based on current circumstances). Base your plan on potential, not history. Anticipate possible problems and barriers to success and develop strategies to overcome them. ■

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What's Your Excuse?

If you have heard interesting excuses, send them to John Paul at jpaul@associationworks.com. We will keep the list updated on our Web site <http://www.associationworks.com>.

75374, 800-986-8472, www.associationworks.com) offers consultation, training, and keynote presentations on strategies guaranteed to increase the effectiveness, profitability, and image of nonprofit organizations. Areas of particular emphasis include change management, nonprofit mergers, relationship fundraising, and customer delight. He has over 25 years of nonprofit management experience and has been a presenter at local, national, and international conferences.

Nonprofit World • Volume 17, Number 4 July/August 1999
Published by the Society for Nonprofit Organizations
6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, WI 53719 • (800) 424-7367

"He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else."

Benjamin Franklin

"It's easier to make excuses than to make a goal."

John Paul