



Be Nice, Even When THEY SAY "NO"

Are you following the fourth rule of fundraising?



By Robert G. Swanson

If the first three rules of fundraising are, "Ask, Ask, Ask," then the fourth is, "Be nice about it."

The relationship between a prospect and fundraiser is unique. It includes elements of a business transaction: written agreements, financial appropriations, and tax ramifications. At the same time, it has emotional and even spiritual components that distinguish it from any other form of sales.

Never presume that
a donor has any
obligation to give.

Trust, confidentiality, and integrity are essential to a healthy and prosperous donor relationship.

An organization should develop a true conviction of its worth and

the services it provides. Fundraisers should never solicit "cap in hand." However, they should also never presume that a donor has any obligation to give.

Ample research and a clear-cut agenda always should precede solicitation. By the time you're ready to solicit prospects, you already should know more about them than many of their closest friends or relatives: facts concerning

continued on page 10

CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Get People Talking

Next time you plan an online auction, think of a clever hook, as the Marshville Skate Park Alliance in Marshville, Massachusetts, did. Their auction included a chance to bid on premium seating to the “Great Hot Tub Debate” — a debate by two local characters in a hot tub set up on the skate-park grounds. The all-day event featured other attractions, including local bands. The auction, with its creative twist, raised \$45,000 for the organization.

Plan an Era-Theme Party

Parties tied to a bygone age are always popular fundraising events. To get ideas for entertainment, costumes, and decorations, rent a movie. For example:

1920s: *The Great Gatsby*, *The Thin Man*

1930s: *Paper Moon*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Philadelphia Story*

1940s: *Casablanca*, *From Here to Eternity*, *It's a Wonderful Life*

1950s: *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Kiss Me Kate*

1960s: *The Graduate*, *American Graffiti*, *Barbarella*

1970s: *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *The Towering Inferno*, *Saturday Night Fever*

Use Faux Celebrities

Can't afford Oprah or The Donald for your event? Bring in their look-alikes. Celebrity look-alikes add to the ambiance of an event. For inspiration, visit these Web sites: www.lookalike.com, www.lookalikes.com, www.tributeproductions.com, www.elvisentertainers.com. For more creative ideas, see “Special Events Galore!”, published monthly for \$79 per year by Stevenson, Inc., www.stevensoninc.com.

Trying to force a gift always backfires.

finances, giving history, casual interests, lifetime passions, personal accomplishments, and dreams. A good fundraiser knows the prospect well.

And still, armed with this arsenal of information, even the best fundraiser can't risk making a fallacious assumption: The prospect must say “yes.”

Trying to force a gift always backfires. No matter how carefully a fundraiser might try to mask manipulation, donors will see right through the facade. Donors who feel as though they gave under mild-mannered duress won't be anxious to give again — or even be willing to meet again.

Never forget that donors still have the prerogative, and sometimes even the responsibility, to say no. Maybe they're not completely sold on the organization. Maybe they're not excited about the current project. Don't let donors' financial capacity overshadow their true humanity.

Donors are dealing with their own troubles: family members in need, sickness or death of a loved one, a downturn in their business, a concern about their own health. Such issues may force donors to offer a qualified, “No”— despite their capacity or positive inclinations.

Don't let donors' financial capacity overshadow their true humanity.

Learn to take “No” as the answer they must make at the time — even if discretion hinders them from sharing the reasons behind their answer. Respect their decision and make the process as comfortable and pleasant as possible.

Do not hesitate to ask. Ask with conviction. But if prospects say “No,” thank them — and leave them remembering the organization with fondness.

Solicitation is never a waste of time. Cultivation has occurred. Stay in contact. Continue to send publications. Chances are, if the interest is there, when circumstances take a turn, so will their answer. ■

Resources

Keller, Tom, “Avoid Disaster when Asking for Large Gifts,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 18, No. 2.

Remley, Dirk, “Relationship Marketing: Guaranteeing the Future,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 14, No. 5.

Simsarian, Astrid, “Ten Key Steps to Continued Contributions,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 13, No. 1.

These resources are available at www.snpo.org/members. Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development (www.snpo.org/li).

“Big gifts are created, not found,” says Robert Swanson, MBA, president of Hartsook Companies, Inc. (www.hartsookcompanies.com), echoing the theme of his upcoming book. Robert is also the president of Hartsook Associates, a subsidiary of Hartsook Companies that helps nonprofits design and implement fundraising programs. A firm believer that every organization has a right to have its dream tested, Robert devotes much of his time to working with new and prospective clients. A graduate of Emporia State University, Robert earned his MBA from Friends University in Wichita.
