

# What to Do When Your Potential Donor Says “No”

It's not the end of the conversation. Here's what to say next.

By Carol Weisman

**N**obody loves being rejected. That's why most of us are reluctant to ask people to give. There's no way to ensure that the answer you hear will always be “yes.” But these tips will help you find out what the issue is and make reluctance work for you.

## Questions to ask if your donor says, “I’m not sure”:

- What information do you need to make a decision?
- Is it our organization, or is the timing not right for you? (If your potential donor says it's the timing, ask when a better time would be.)
- I sense that you have some questions. Can you share them with me?

## What to say when your potential donor has had a bad experience with your organization:

- That is totally unacceptable. May I have your permission to look into this and find out what happened?
- That's why I'm here today. I'm afraid that at our current funding level this might happen again. What do you think we should do differently?
- Is there anything I can do to make this up to you?

## What to say when you realize the person you're speaking with isn't the ultimate decision maker:

- I sense that you're not sure. In addition to you, is there someone else we should include in our next conversation?
- Is there additional information I should share with anyone else? Should I contact that person?
- You know, I think I might have made a mistake. This isn't my first. I sense that you make decisions with [your wife, husband, or financial adviser], and I probably should have invited him/her. (Then stop talking.)

## How to deal with an emphatic “No!”:

- I hear that you aren't interested. Would you mind helping me out and sharing why?
- Boy, that's disappointing. I want to do a good job for our organization. Is there anything we could do better so that you might be interested in our cause?
- Is this a “no” now or forever?

# NO

“When you hear “yes,” you leave richer. When you hear “no,” you leave smarter.”

## The two words you must always remember:

When asking questions of reluctant donors, keep two words in the back of your mind: “gentle” and “respectful.” You have two jobs: One is to serve your organization's mission, and the other is to help your prospect make a wise philanthropic investment that will not only delight and please but will turn your prospect into an advocate. Whenever people share why they're hesitant to give, it's a gift to you and should be graciously accepted.

Ultimately, reluctance is a marketing and fact-finding opportunity. If you hear the same negative things over and over, it's time to make major changes in your organization. When you hear “yes,” you leave richer. When you hear “no,” you leave smarter. Either way, you win. **S**

*Carol Weisman (carol@boardbuilders.com) is founder and president of Board Builders (boardbuilders.com) as well as an internationally known speaker, author, trainer, and consultant. See her Learning Institute program (Board Governance) online at NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute.*

## The Right Way to Ask

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**Turning the Direct Ask into Gold** (Vol. 30, No. 1)

**Getting Comfortable with the F Word** (Vol. 20, No. 4)

**Seven Steps to a Successful Gift** (Vol. 22, No. 4)

**Fifty Shades of Fundraising** (Vol. 33, No. 3)

**Is There a Role for Your Board in Raising Funds?** (Vol. 23, No. 3)

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