



How to Ask When (You Believe) It's Too Soon to Ask

Even if the timing feels wrong, you can forge a positive funding relationship. Just follow these steps.

By Marcy Heim

Sometimes you need to ask for money before your donor relationships are as solid as you want them to be. Maybe you're new to your position, or you haven't had time to contact your donors as much as you might have.

It's never the perfect time. There will always be things you wish were different. But you need to do the best with what you have, so here's what to do now:

Believe in your mission.

When you believe, you'll be believed. All the research tells us that the main driver to give is that your donor believes in your mission and wants to make a difference. Your deep belief radiates from you as enthusiasm for your mission – and that is infectious.

Build rapport.

People like people who are like themselves. That means you listen, sincerely care about their position, and use the device of mirroring. For example, you can mirror people's volume and speed of speaking or adopt a position they're taking. If you're making the ask in person, you can mirror their movements, such as crossing legs, leaning forward, and repeating their words back to them.

“Use the device of mirroring to build rapport.”

Thank them.

Only thank them. *No* soft asks. Research shows that donors who are genuinely thanked are three times more likely to give – and give more. The catch? Insincerity or remarks like, “and I can't wait to meet to tell you about our new plans” or “and we look forward to your continued participation in our giving family” or “we value you as part of our cherished supporters” dilute the impact of your gratitude. Say “thank you” and shut up.

Timing is critical. This sincere thanks must happen as a separate touch before any visit/e-mail/letter to ask for more money.

Admit this isn't the ideal time.

Let them know you feel this ask is coming too fast. Say something like, “I wish I had more time to help you understand how important X is for our mission.”

It's easier to make this case if your organization stays in touch with mailings or updates throughout the year. More conversations/touches give you a chance to listen and home in on what's important to your donor so you can frame the project and the ask amount to what most deeply resonates with them. Sometimes you may have to ferret this out in one call. You might choose phrases such as:

- “**So I'm hearing X is important** to you?”
- “**Based on your impressions of us**, do you think we're doing a good job of addressing X with our programs?”
- “**Some unplanned needs have developed**, and we're looking to our best friends to help right now.”

“Donors who are genuinely thanked are three times more likely to give.”

- “We’ll get a \$50,000 match if we can raise the money by X.”

These are ways to share why you’re moving the relationship along to the ask before it feels right.

Make an artful ask, using just three sentences.

Write out and practice your ask ahead of time. Use the three-sentence ask:

1. **You have** (Compliment them on their past giving, service, status in the community)
2. **You understand** (Describe the impact of the gift you’re asking for.)
3. **Would you consider a gift of \$_____ for?** (Detail who the money will be going to, what it will be used for, and the special need it will fulfill.)

That’s all – just three sentences, with no sentence longer than 17 words. Then stop talking, and let them think about it. Most relationship damage is done by pressing for an answer. Let them know exactly when you’ll call or stop by again to see where they are with their consideration, and bid them a warm good-bye. 

Marcy Heim, CFRE, PLCC, has over 30 years of fundraising and management success. Her workshops, keynotes, and coaching packages produce dramatic fundraising and team-satisfaction results. Sign up for a complimentary subscription of Artful Action, her ezine, at marcyheim.com.

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