

How to Keep from Losing Donors: A Self-Assessment

Take this brief quiz to see if you're doing all you can to keep valuable donors and win back those you lose.

By Charles Maclean

Answer each question with a Yes or No. The results will suggest ways you can improve your donor retention strategies.

_____ **1. Do you regularly conduct written and verbal “donor satisfaction” evaluations?** It's much easier to salvage donors when they're moderately upset versus trying to recover them after they've slammed the door shut and won't return your calls.

_____ **2. Do you have the courage to ask new donors up-front, “What might cause you to discontinue giving? How can we, together, make sure that doesn't happen?”** Few fundraisers ask their donors about their “conditions of satisfaction/dissatisfaction” in the beginning and only learn of them after it's too late.

_____ **3. Do you know exactly how your major donors want to be acknowledged** and how they *don't* want to be acknowledged? Developing a formal “acknowledgment profile” for each major donor for each campaign and having it in your database is essential. People's wishes regarding anonymity and selective acknowledgment is as personal as their thumbprints. You'll lose them if you don't honor those wishes.

_____ **4. Do you have a formal job description for your board and volunteer fundraisers?** Does that description spell out what you expect of them in terms of referring peers, asking people for money, and asking about their satisfaction with your organization? Board unwillingness to take these actions may be a sign of unclear expectations or the need to educate them about their responsibilities.

_____ **5. When you lose major donors, do you formally and informally talk to them within 30 days** to find out why? Do you even know when you've lost a donor? The longer the time between donor divorce and debriefing, the deeper the discontent and the greater the likelihood that the lost donor will tell others, who will tell others, and so on.


“Being nice can get in the way of essential feedback.”

_____ **6. Do you have a way for lost donors to give you anonymous feedback?** Fear of embarrassment, avoidance of conflict, attempts to be nice, and fear of liability, all can get in the way of receiving the feedback you need to reduce your vulnerabilities and make continuous improvement.

_____ **7. Do you really want to know why your major donors have left you?** If you can't afford to hear the answer, don't ask the question. You must be big enough to hear tough love messages and be willing to experience embarrassment, anger, shame, sadness, and fear in order to grow.

_____ **8. Are you committed to taking positive remedial action based on the feedback you hear?** Lost donors may be even angrier if you ignore their candid feedback and don't respond to reasonable requests for change. You may not be able to salvage the lost donor, but you can keep from making the same costly, alienating mistakes again, and again, and again.

_____ **9. Do you know how much a lost major donor costs your organization** in terms of annual and end of life gifts, loss of referrals, negative comments to other potential donors, dampening of staff morale, and cuts in programs and services for those you serve? Computing average direct and indirect lifetime loss per donor will guide your decision-making in budgeting for preventive and remedial action.

_____ **10. Do you know your own personal “prouds” and “do betters”** in terms of major donor relationship building skills? Do you have a plan and timetable for self-improvement? If not, why not? If not now, when? Without one, you and your organization are at risk of operating in a vacuum. 

“Do you even know when you've lost a donor?”

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