

How Should You Treat Gifts to Team Members?

If nonprofit employees receive individual donations, what should they do?

Q We are a nonprofit search and rescue team. We often get donations from those we help. One person in a group recently sent individual gift certificates to each individual on the team as a thank you. How should we treat this event?

A Treat this as a perfect opportunity to create a policy on individual gifts to team members. Many organizations, particularly those like nursing homes that deal with vulnerable people, have a policy that prohibits employees from accepting gifts or gratuities from the patients or clients. Development offices usually have policies that prohibit acceptance of gifts from potential donors except in unusual situations, like lunch at the donor's home or club. Other

organizations prohibit gifts over a certain dollar value, or require that gifts to be turned over to the organization. (One nursing home with an absolute prohibition on gifts had to tell a nurse that accepting a \$1 million bequest from a resident would cost her her job. You can guess what choice the nurse made.)

Most organizations don't want their employees or volunteers to use their positions for personal advantage. The important thing is to have a policy so that everybody knows the rules in advance and you don't have to ask what to do when the event arises.

Don Kramer, Nonprofit Issues, nonprofitissues.com

How Can You Keep Your Donors from Leaving?

Why do nonprofits lose their donors, and what are the remedies?

Q Our organization has a tough time keeping current donors, much less trying to win back those who have left. We find this especially true for our corporate donors. Do you have any ideas about ways to retain donors?

A Here are some common pitfalls to avoid if you want to keep donors coming back:

Being Slow or Inefficient. You need to put as much effort into recognizing a donation as you do into asking for it. Acknowledge every donation with a thank-you letter and tax receipt as quickly as possible.

Not Getting Enough People Involved. You hold in-person meetings with your corporate donors. Great! But do you really want to limit that meeting to just one person? Always ask your corporate donor to invite other corporation staff to the meeting. Then follow up with all the attendees. People leave companies all the time. The more contacts you have at a company, the more chance you have of keeping the donation pipeline intact.

Failing to Share the Good News. People want to know how their donations are making a difference. Let them know how their contribution helped — and not in a general way. Be as personal as possible. Human stories have a greater impact than facts and figures.

Asking for Too Much, Too Often. Reminder phone calls or e-mails are part of your process, but don't go overboard. Even the best relationship can go sour if you always have your hand out. Keep track of donations, and make sure you aren't asking the same people for donations too often.

Communicating on Your Schedule Instead of Theirs.

Some people want to donate once a year, others on a quarterly basis. It's your job to find out. Ask how often they want to hear from you. Then schedule calls and e-mails accordingly.

Failing to Reassure the Hesitant Donor. Remember that there are scammers and dubious organizations everywhere. Pressuring someone to make a big donation right off the bat could be a sure way to never hear from them again. Let them — even encourage them to — start small to see how your donation process works. Make the process smooth. Donating to a new organization can be a risk. Letting donors get to know you by starting out small could lead to bigger donations down the road.

Neglecting to Personalize the Process. E-mails and letters may be a good way to make the first contact, but nothing beats face-to-face communication. Arranging in-person meetings is the best way to build long-lasting relationships.

Failing to See Your Shortcomings. This is where a short survey can be invaluable. Only a small portion of your donors may respond, say 10% or so, but that's enough to get a feel of whether there are problems in your donation process or within your organization. Address those concerns, no matter how seemingly insignificant, and you'll be able to turn a reluctant donor into one you can count on year after year.

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