



Building A Relationship With Your Donors

The Key To Success: Turning "Tryers" Into "Buyers"

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Persuading a prospect to donate to your cause or organization is only the first tiny step in your relationship with that donor. And it is that relationship, good or bad, that will ultimately determine how much support that individual eventually gives to your cause.

The old adage is that advertising finds "tryers" not "buyers" and the same can be said of direct mail fund raising. The first time a consumer "tries" a product he or she is still somewhat skeptical. And why should they not be? They won't become buyers until that product proves to be what they anticipated it would be. If it falls short of their expectations, they will never buy that product again. It's as simple as that.


When donors "try" an organization or cause by making a contribution, they have not made a lasting commitment. They anticipate that the organization will successfully attack and

complete the task described in the fund appeal. If that doesn't happen or even if it happens and they don't know about it, their confidence in the organization will be shaken and the likelihood of a second gift will be diminished.


Donors View: *Perception = Reality*

Plato said that "Perception is the illusion of reality." Well, if the perception of your organization and its efforts is that you are not getting the job done (even if you are), your opportunity for further support is greatly reduced. That's why getting that first gift is only a tiny step toward building a firm foundation of financial support for your organization.

Assuming that you are getting the job done, the challenge to you is communication. And good communication occurs when you have developed a solid and ongoing relationship with your donors.



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4 Steps to a Solid Relationship

What steps should you take to build a good relationship with all your donors, no matter the size of their individual gifts? The answer lies in your own personal relationships. What do you do when you care about others and want them to care about you? You spend time with them. You communicate with them. You listen to them. You share photos and personal experiences with them. And most of all, you do it regularly.

While you may not have time to sit down with each individual donor, you can communicate with them and show them that you care about them and value their opinion. How do you do this? Here are four steps to building a solid relationship with each donor:

STEP ONE *Thank Your Supporters*

The first step begins with thanking the donor for his or her contribution.

Thanking someone for a gift is just common courtesy. When you don't do it the donor presumes you really didn't appreciate it. If that's the case, why give again?

But when you thank them, be practical. If the donor gave \$5 or less, you probably can't afford to send a thank you. The cost may end up being more than the gift. Sure you appreciate the contribution, but reality dictates that you silently appreciate this level of support.

On the other end of the scale, how do you make those \$100+ donors know how much you appreciate their support? The answer is to call them on the telephone and personally thank them for their help. This is the easiest call you will ever make. Everyone likes to be thanked for his or her support. And here's a little secret. Your personal thank you will not only help to seal a long and lasting relationship, but it will also spur this donor to dramatically increase his or her support for your organization. It's not at all

unusual for a \$100 donor to become a \$1,000 or even a \$10,000 donor. So do yourself a favor, make that call to your \$100 donors and do it today.

Now what about the vast majority of donors, those in the \$10 to \$99 range? You must make absolutely certain they not only receive a written thank you, but that they do so on a timely basis. If you receive a gift in the first week of May, you won't get much goodwill from a thank you that arrives two months later. Timeliness is just as important as the quality of your thank you.

And speaking of quality, there's absolutely nothing wrong in asking for a second gift in your thank you. Remember, the strongest opportunity for a second gift from a first time donor is within the first six weeks. After that, your chances of getting that second gift go downhill dramatically. And that brings us to step number two.


STEP TWO *Mail Frequently*

It's time for a little mind bending. You must strive to put aside past conceptions to understand this important step in building a solid relationship with your donors.


One of the biggest mistakes many organizations make is to assume that they will have a better relationship with their donors if they ask for funds less frequently. This is a deadly misconception. And frankly, it is illogical.

Ask yourself this question. Who do you have a better and closer relationship with, someone you talk to almost daily, or someone you only hear from on rare occasions? Of course, the answer is obvious. The person you stay in close contact with is going to be a closer friend.

The same standard holds for direct mail fund raising. The donor that hears from you every few weeks is going to know a lot more about you and remember you far better than if you only come around a few times a year asking for money.



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While the common perception is that folks are tired of getting so many appeals, the truth is that's just not the case. The bottom line does not lie. The fact is, the less frequently you send fund appeals to your donors, the less committed they are going to be to your organization. The inevitable result is that you will lose donors to other organizations and causes, because you refuse to share your financial needs with them on a regular basis.

After all, a letter is a very unintrusive medium. It takes almost no effort to toss it into the trash can. And you have no way of knowing if your appeal will arrive when the prospective donor has money in his or her checking account. If they don't, you're out of luck, no matter how compelling your solicitation may be. Keep in mind that your success is totally dependent on the donors' access to discretionary funds. They must pay the mortgage, buy groceries, and put clothes on their back before they have the latitude to make a gift to your cause, no matter how important or urgent it may be.

So, if you want to establish an ongoing relationship with your donors and if you want to minimize the attrition rate, communicate frequently with your donors. Ask them for support. After all, you are giving them something important - a genuine opportunity to participate in a worthwhile cause.

STEP THREE *Stay On Message*

If you are to maximize your success in raising funds through the mail, you must keep your fund appeals focused. That means keeping both your prospect appeals and your house appeals within a framework that is consistent and related. For example, if your prospecting efforts range from child welfare to emergency relief, don't be surprised if your donor doesn't understand your mission. He will be confused. And a confused donor is a non-donor.

If you feel you must engage in wide-

ly divergent prospect efforts, then consider the creation of separate and unique donor files. Unless there is homogeneity among the donors in terms of the issues that excite them, you will have difficulty in keeping them. That means a breakdown in your relationship with them. They came on board with the understanding that you are one kind of an organization with a specific mission, but when you turn out to be something else don't be surprised when they jump ship.

STEP FOUR *Tell Them What You're Doing*


It doesn't make any difference if you are doing a great job or a horrible one if the donor doesn't know anything about it. It's not their job to find out whether you are getting the job done - it is up to you.

And the simplest way to do that is through a newsletter. This is a medium that allows you to provide photographic evidence of getting the job done. If you are feeding the poor, helping animals in distress or supporting a museum, include photos that prove you are acting in accord with the promises you made in the fund appeal. That's solid evidence that you are indeed getting the job done.


It's critically important that you use this newsletter to talk about and validate the projects and programs the donor has supported. This newsletter is expressly for donors. It's not the place to wax philosophical and deal with topics and issues totally unrelated to the fund raising effort. If you make this mistake, your newsletter will not only fail to solidify your relationship with your donor, but may in fact harm it.

You should, however, use your newsletter to introduce yourself and the key members of your staff. Let the donor know that he or she has invested

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with quality people that can be counted on to produce results. The better job you do of communicating through your newsletter, the more ownership your donor will take in your organization. And the more ownership he or she takes, the greater the support will be.

Finally, don't get so wrapped up in the graphics and the copy that you neglect to be timely. A newsletter that never gets off the drawing board and is seen only infrequently fails in its mission of strengthening the relationship with your donors. Keep it simple, straightforward, in focus, and timely. The rewards will become obvious.

It's All About Good Communication

Building a lasting and strong relationship with your supporters is all about good communication. Whether through consistent prospect and house appeals, written or telephone acknowledgements, or a newsletter that reinforces your fund raising theme, you must not only get that first gift, but convince your donors that their contributions are an investment well made in an important cause. When they understand that, you will have developed the kind of commitment that an organization must have to get the job done.



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