



## REDUCING FUNDRAISING ANXIETY TO CREATE THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME

Ask anyone to help fundraise for your favorite cause or charity and the reaction is likely to be somewhere between mild anxiety and outright terror. Why? Such a reaction is almost always born out of an inadequate or misinformed understanding of what constitutes “fundraising.”

Too many of us equate fundraising with begging or, at best, buying and selling. When we approach another seeking a gift, we see it as taking from that person—extracting something that without significant or undue influence or the promise of a material return, that person would not otherwise give. Nothing could be further from the truth. Individuals who are philanthropic, and over 70% of Americans make charitable gifts, do so to improve the lives of others and make their communities better places to live.

So why do we persist in seeing fundraising as “taking?” The predominance of transactional approaches to fundraising—auctions, galas, product sales—certainly contribute to that perception. Even the techniques employed in many direct asks—asking directly for a gift, per se, are often about little more than “getting the gift” then moving to the next “prospect.” More fundamental, perhaps, is a wide-spread lack

of understanding of why donors make gifts in the first place.

Donors make gifts to see the realization of their personal values—the visions they hold dear. In this regard they are much more like “investors” than “consumers.” With this understanding, seeking a charitable gift is no longer a transaction but the invitation for an individual to share in your organization’s vision, its values. This intangible return is what philanthropic investors seek. And to them, it is much more valuable and powerful than money.

Armed with this understanding, fundraisers—professional and volunteer—become much more confident that, properly communicated, they are offering the philanthropic investor the opportunity of a lifetime—self-fulfillment; something that money alone simply cannot buy. The stakes are raised, however, for investors want to be partners in your success, not merely bystanders.

Philanthropic investors want to be appreciated more than recognized. Including donors in this way takes an ongoing commitment to them. That ongoing commitment to communicate, show meaningful results and heighten donors’ personal stake in your organization’s success often requires a total re-thinking of an organization’s fundraising paradigm. It can be not a little bit scary. A paradigm built upon the concept of investment,

however, is not only the key to developing meaningful relationships built upon mutual trust and benefit, thereby eliminating the anxiety of the process but is also the critical component to fundraising sustainability.

This paradigm—this manner of thinking—of fundraising provides for sustainability and expandability precisely because it is built upon long-term renewal of donors whose stake in the organization or cause, personal, and financial, grows over time. Fundraising costs plummet as the cost of acquiring a donor for the very first time is very high. Those organizations that depend upon a steady influx of new supporters to make gifts discover that their costs for doing so consume much of what is given.

I call this approach the “triple win.” The organization “wins” as its outreach is sustained and expanded at the lowest possible financial cost. The fundraiser “wins” by being successful in procuring essential resources for an organization he or she believes in. And last, and most important, the donor “wins” through the opportunity to fulfill personal values—something money alone will not buy.

So, when you’re approached to fundraise for your favorite cause or organization, there’s no need to cringe and duck. The key is to shape the method and approach to attitudes that are built upon mutual benefit and personal investment. You’ll even make some new friends.