

FUNDRAISING

The Challenge is Never the Ask

In our rush to hit financial goals, are we straying from what's most important: developing genuine relationships?

By Steve Zastrow

When organizations think, plan or merely talk about fundraising, the first thing that jumps to everyone's mind is "Making the Ask!" It doesn't matter if you're a first-time volunteer or a seasoned development professional: We all instinctively want to jump to the finish line.

But in our rush to achieve our financial goals, are we straying from what is most important: Developing genuine relationships with our constituents?

In fact, yes. Truly successful organizations ask us to do more than just "give and get" – they present us with a cause that we care about and that genuinely needs our help, inspiring us to rise to the occasion! Our jobs as CEOs, development directors, and consultants should include fostering and growing that culture of caring by engaging our constituents through active and meaningful involvement.

One outcome of genuinely engaging our constituents is clear: We stand to raise more funds. But ultimately we also gain much more in the process. For example, when truly engaged and listened to, volunteers can offer insightful ideas that help us more effectively achieve our missions and visions. They extend our reach to involve more constituents and supporters, and they bring excitement to often difficult and sometimes thankless work.

In reality successful fundraising is 99% cultivation and only 1% solicitation. If you're working strategically, by the time you "Make the Ask," all the work has already been done. And if done properly and effectively, an ask is like a marriage proposal – you should already know the answer!

So, if you think about it again, we are always fundraising, aren't we? We are constantly making new friends when we share our missions and visions; creating trusted advisors when we solicit opinions and involve constituents in strategic planning – and most of all, we continue to grow and build the next generation of philanthropic activists when we recognize and acknowledge these efforts.

The challenge is never really the ask. The true challenge is developing significant and genuine relationships with our constituents from the very start. Relationships that ultimately create the opportunities and desire for them to give – long before we make the "ask."

Steve Zastrow is a Senior Consultant with The Phoenix Philanthropy Group. He can be reached at 602-758-5963, or by email at zastrow@phoenixphilanthropy.com

