A Guide to Asking and Getting

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Asking for a gift for a favorite non-profit or cause offers an uplifting opportunity in which everyone involved — solicitor, recipient and donor — can come out ahead. It can and should be approached in precisely that spirit. Here are 10 tips to help you make the most of these opportunities.

1. Keep the solicitation in perspective: What's the worst that can happen? You are turned down. Who among us hasn't heard "no?" Remember, you're not asking for yourself, but for a noble cause you believe in. The returns are worth the risks many times over.

2. Manage time prudently: It's imperative that we make the most of the precious 30 to 40 minutes that likely will comprise our appointment. Be sure to get to the ask within the first 10 to 15 minutes of the visit and leave plenty of time to respond to questions and concerns. To be able to manage time, the solicitor must tactfully but firmly take control of the conversation right from "hello."

3. Don't overwhelm the prospect: A good rule of thumb is that there should be no more than twice the number of solicitors to prospects. So, if you're only calling on one prospect, be sure there is not more than two of you. A combination of one volunteer and one staff member works well. Choose a place that ensures privacy.

4. Consider this time sequence:
- Five minutes (maximum): Opening pleasantries.
- Five minutes: Presentation of the problem or challenge being addressed.
- Five minutes: Compelling arguments on how the request responds to the problem/challenge.
- Two minutes: The ask.
- 20 minutes: Responding to questions/concerns.
- Five minutes: Wrap up/next steps.

We've learned that video/virtual solicitations can be successful, but it's important to make video meetings shorter than if they were in person

5. Always ask for a specific amount: We live in a price tag-driven world, and philanthropy is no different. Include the rationale on how the amount was determined.

6. Be ready for questions: Most of the time questions/concerns revolve around four primary areas:
- The Organization
- The Project
- The Amount
- The Timing

7. After the ask has been made, remain absolutely silent: Even if this seems like an eternity, resist the temptation to say anything until the prospect has responded. Too many gifts are lost or reduced by failing to adhere to this principle.

8. Leave-behind material should be used exactly that way: Don't ask the prospect to read along the proposal as you review the high points. You never want to jeopardize eyeball to eyeball contact. Collateral material will speak for you after you've left.

9. Close with authority: If you're fortune enough to receive a "yes," thank profusely. Often, the prospect may ask for more time. Set a specific date to get back together and resume the conversation. Even if the prospect says no, thank them for their time and suggest that you would like to stay in contact to keep them apprised of progress.

10. Send a handwritten thank-you note: This is regarded as the secret sauce in the fundraising recipe. How many handwritten notes do you receive? It will make you stand out. Send a note even if you're turned down.

Closing thought: Maya Angelou said that "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Be sure to make your donor prospects feel like the most important people in the world to you.

About the Trainer

Jim Eskin's leadership roles span more than 30 years in fundraising, public affairs and communications in the San Antonio area. He enjoys training non-profit boards on fundraising best practices and overcoming the fear of asking for gifts In 2018 he launched a consulting practice www.eskinfundraisingtraining.com to build on the success of his fundraising workshops and webinars and provide the training, coaching and support services that non-profits need to compete for and secure private gifts. His Non-Profit Empowerment series has earned a robust and popular place in the advancement education arena. His fundraising benchmarks include establishing records for gifts from individuals at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) and Alamo Colleges Foundation. He has authored more than 100 guest columns that have appeared in daily newspapers and business journals across the country. He publishes *Stratagems*, a monthly e-newsletter exploring timely issues and trends in philanthropy, advocacy, and image.