

Making the Ask: Your Approach with Donors Can Make All the Difference

Have you ever heard the following words from a donor after asking for a gift?

“I really appreciate your approach to asking me for a gift.”

Well, when I heard them recently, I nearly fell off my chair! Then the donor proceeded to tell me about another solicitation that left him feeling bullied and guilty, and how much more pleasant this experience had just been. He ultimately gave the \$50K I asked for to help fund our recent capital project, AND he felt really good about it!

When sitting down with a donor to ask for a gift, whether that gift is to fund a program or capital project, sponsor an event, support the annual fund or something else, you should do more listening than talking. The conversation is about helping the donor meet his or her goals, not you meeting yours. Of course, you need to meet your goals, but if you take the time to find out the donor's philanthropic interests, the result will help you and your organization.

Naturally, before your meeting, the donor knows why you want to meet because you have told him or her. You should never set a meeting without being transparent. So, the fact that you got the meeting is a good sign that he or she is interested in your organization and interested in considering a gift.

Your approach should be respectful and friendly. Talk about other things the donor has funded, if appropriate, and let him or her know the impact those gifts have made. You want to let the donor know how grateful you are for his or her past support and what it meant for those you serve. This should spark some conversation about the interests of the donor.

Even if this donor has not given before, you have probably already met or at least spoken on the phone, and you have some idea of his or her interests. But each time you meet there is an opportunity to learn more, so keep your ears open! You should be authentically interested in what he or she has to say and show it.

Take all that you have learned into account when you move the conversation on to the new funding opportunity. Obviously, you need to do some talking to describe the opportunity, but encourage questions along the way. It's always better when it's a conversation between you and your donor and not just a presentation by you. You know the donor is engaged when there is a good bit of back and forth.

Once you feel that the donor has no more questions and looks by his or her body language that it's time for the ask, I like to use the words, “I hope you will consider a gift of \$X to fund Y.” You fill in the X and Y. The next thing you should do is listen. If there is silence, just wait. Your donor should have the next word. They may not be the words I heard, but hopefully the words will be positive.

Happy Asking!