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7 Tips on Asking for Donations – It’s Intimidating, We Get It

By Marc Koenig

When it comes to asking for donations, most of us head for the hills.

We get it. It’s intimidating to ask other people to part with their hard earned cash. They might ask, “Why?” And we might not have a great answer.

At its heart, fundraising is helping others connect an existing passion directly to your cause. **We don’t convince donors. We help them realize that they already care.**

Once donors believe that your cause truly matters, giving almost becomes an afterthought. Of course they’ll give! The question simply becomes how much to ask for.

But until then, you won’t have to sweat your fundraising ask if you follow these seven tips:

7 Tips on Asking for Donations



1. Research Your Donors to Read Their Minds

The words you want them to say: *“Wow, it’s like he read my mind!”*

How do you get to that point? You research your donor as an individual, but you *also* have a broad depth of general research on the kinds of people who donate to your nonprofit as a whole group.

You need to be able to answer these questions if you want to get into a donor's heart:

- What kinds of words do they use? What do they talk about when they're feeling passionate?
- What do they care about? What other causes are they a part of?
- Do they have a history of giving?
- What are their common objections, fears and concerns about giving?

Thanks to the web, we have more access to information about our donors than ever, as well as the ability to survey our donors and examine how they talk about our cause.

Note, however, that if you survey your donors or ask questions of a potential donor, you have to **learn to read the answer behind the answer**.

We have to address the fears and risks every donor feels, *even if the donor herself can't identify them out loud*. And then, we get to connect their existing passions and desires to your NPO, using the same language they use.

In other words, **understand your donor base so well it's like you've read their minds**.

Don't worry, this is easier than it sounds if you follow the next six tips...



2. Practice, Practice, PRACTICE – And Then Practice Some More

The best way to dominate your donor visits, get more funds and create real, lasting connections with your nonprofit ... is to **PRACTICE every aspect of your ask.**

In other words, by the time you are *actually sitting in front of a prospect*, you should have rehearsed the many paths the conversation could take MANY times before. Understanding your talking points, how you'll graciously address common objections and the exact way you'll frame your ask *allows* you to stop thinking about these things and just focus on talking with the donor.

Practice your ask. Can't emphasize it enough.

Run through how you'll call them on the phone. Plan on how to structure your meeting. Decide how long you'll small talk at the beginning, and how to transition smoothly into the ask itself. Leave no stone unturned!

The key to this:

- Practice out loud.
- Then, practice in front of a mirror.
- Then, record yourself on video practicing.

It's painful, but you'll learn things about your delivery and be far more confident and free when it comes to actually making the ask. ***Don't skip this step.***



3. Never, Ever Surprise Your Prospect

If your potential donor is ever surprised you're asking them for money, something is deeply amiss.

Make it clear in your *first* call or contact that you're interested in talking to them about your cause and how they might be able to get involved. Make it clear that, while you're interested in them as a person, **there's a deeper purpose for your visit**. That way, they'll be able to prepare their response, objections and questions.



4. Stop Being Boring (It Isn't Worth It)

Boring feels *safe*. No presenter who just reads bullet points off a PowerPoint instead does it because they want their audience to eagerly contemplate running from the room.

Nope, they do it because it feels *safe*. Reading a PowerPoint feels like an easy way to tell your audience all the info they want and be sure not to forget anything important. But instead, **you fail to keep your audience engaged**.

The actual way to be safe is what we discussed above: PRACTICE. Then you won't need slides, and you can focus instead on **not being boring**.

Don't be scared of sounding weird or too forward by asking things like, "What do you think is the biggest challenge we face in this area?" Provoke interesting reactions that are memorable, not boring, formulaic encounters.

Of course, your real goal is to make your donor both catch your enthusiasm and feel understood. But to get there, you need let yourself be not-boring enough that they can have fun talking to you.

5.

Ask them for *Advice*



- YES
- NO
- MAYBE

5. Ask for Advice – You’ll Usually End Up with Money

The old fundraising maxim applies here:

“Ask for money, you’ll get advice. Ask for *advice*, you’ll get *money*.”

What most people truly want is to be heard. Asking for advice means that they will freely tell you the secret thing they are most passionate about, as well as their biggest fears about giving.

And most importantly, the donor will feel valued and important. *Which they are!* They’re the ones whose enthusiasm makes changes happen in the world. So ask them for their input and impressions.

For more tips on the advice visit, check out Gail Perry’s great article on how [advice visits can open any door in town](#).



6.

Kill 'em with *Silence*

6. Your Secret Weapon is Pointed Silence

Our culture HATES silence. We want to fill it. This is one reason why extroverted salespeople and fundraisers can do worse than introverts.

But often times, the most important, meaningful thing – the thing your prospect REALLY wants to tell you – won't be said if you quickly fill the silence.

Bad Fundraiser: "What's the most important thing about the environment to you?"

Donor: "Well, I think environmental damage is a pretty big problem. We're hurting the environment forever and we don't even realize it!"

Bad Fundraiser: "Yeah, you're so right! That's why our Program X is so important! Let me tell you... [*Donor hears: "blah blah blah"*]

NOOOOOOOO—don't do this! **Your funding for next year will die a thousand painful deaths.**

Here's how that conversation could have gone:

Superman Fundraiser: "What's the most important thing about the environment to you?"

Donor: "Well, I think environmental damage is a pretty big problem. We're hurting the environment forever and we don't even realize it!"

Superman Fundraiser: "How interesting!" [*shuts up and looks genuinely interested*]

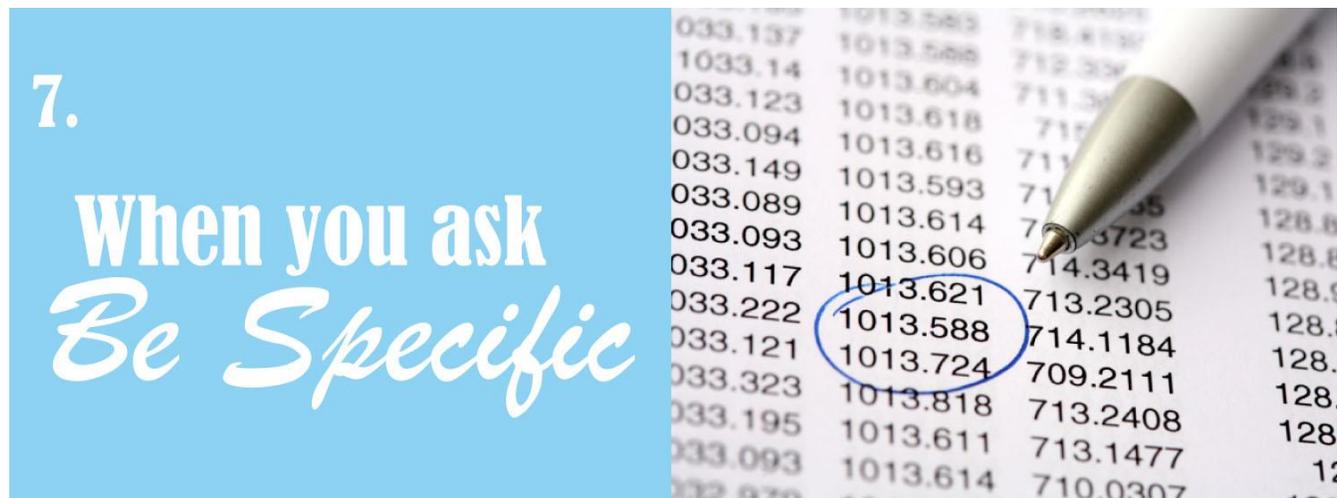
Donor: *[feels like he should talk because of the silence]* "... yeah! It's really crazy. In fact, the other day I was thinking about when I was a kid and would go out and look at the stars in the country and see meteors and all kinds of awesome stuff. But now that the city is so big, and there's so much light pollution and smog, when I go out with MY kids to our cabin we're lucky to see anything. It's so sad."

WOW. And you were about to start making a generic appeal about one of your programs, totally at random! Now you have so much material to work with, and know exactly the RIGHT program to talk about.

Your donor has practically sold themselves, all because you shut up! You're fundraising for *this guy's kids' happiness* now, not your program!

Too many advice-givers say "*just listen better!*" but fail to tell you that means "*shut up and allow silence, even if it feels awkward at first.*" Great journalists love this technique – it gets them the best interviews and quotes.

By the way, this works in discussions of all kinds – whether you're negotiating a contract, your salary, trying to understand your significant other or asking for a donation. **Use strategic silence next time you talk with anyone.** Its effects feel almost magical.



7. Ask for a Specific Amount (Don't Make Your Donor Do Any Work)

Finally, always ask for a *specific amount* to contribute to the cause.

Why is this important? Because it takes the burden off of the donor to figure out what size of a donation is necessary. They don't know anything about your campaign goals. You do. So help them out. **Don't make your donor do the work.**

For some great, non-confrontational phrases to ask for a specific donation amount, I recommend checking out Marc Pitman's excellent post on [his favorite major donor fundraising phrases](#).

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We get it. Asking for money is intimidating.

But **it's also an immense privilege**. You're inviting other people to take action on a cause that they genuinely care about.

You're selling significance. And at the end of the day, most people don't mind feeling like they're making an outsized impact on the world.

You've just got to *ask them to*.

This article was written by Marc Koenig. You can find it online by going to:

<http://nonprofithub.org/fundraising/7-tips-on-asking-for-donations-its-intimidating-we-get-it/>