6 Steps to Fundraise Without Fear or Feeling Awkward

Let's invite donors to give - without any weirdness!

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Empowered Fundraiser Consulting

Start Here

Fundraising without fear starts with your own connection to the cause. Use these six steps to reflect on your giving, understand donors' motivations, and bring gratitude into donor engagement.

Like so many things in life, fundraising is not really about us.

It's about the amazing non-profits changing the world for the better. These organizations need us. They need confident, competent fundraisers (paid and volunteer!) who are comfortable working with donors to inspire their philanthropy.

This resource will help you get out of your head. It's not the end-all-be-all. There's more training to do, but this will get you a jump start!

The Six Steps

1. Evaluate Your Relationship With the Cause
2. Make Your Own Gift and Make It Count
3. Be Curious About Why Donors Give
4. Begin By Saying Thank You
5. Get Your Mindset Right
6. Keep Learning

1. Evaluate Your Relationship With the Cause

Begin by asking yourself:

- Do I understand the organization's mission?
- Do I trust the leaders?
- Do I relate their success with my success?
- Is my affiliation with this cause part of my self-identity?
- Do I feel a strong sense of ownership over successes and setbacks?

Your connection to the cause

- I have a general idea of what they're up to, and I'm here for it.
- I know and trust the leaders of the org, and my financial support is part of my self-identity.
- I feel a sense of ownership of the organization's success - their triumphs are my triumphs.

2. Make Your Own Gift and Make It Count

Before you ask anyone else to consider the irrational act of giving away their money, do it yourself. Make a gift, and make it meaningful. Dig deep.

Now you can tell people what it meant to you - how you made the decision, where the money came from, how you designated it, why you gave when you did - all based on your own lived experience.

People need social proof that it's a good idea to make a gift. Your philanthropy, and your authentic experience as a donor, positions you to ask others to join you. Keep in mind, there are many ways to make a gift. Here are just a few.

Ways to make a gift

- Gift or pledge of cash or appreciated stock
- Multi-year pledge or recurring monthly gift
- In-kind gift (service, goods, products)
- Through your estate

3. Be Curious About Why Donors Give

We need to understand WHY people give. What do they want to accomplish with their philanthropy? There are many, many motivations for giving - you need to know the tipping point for your donor.

- Response to a crisis
- Gratitude - they benefitted from the org in the past (grateful patient for example)
- Loyalty. Think alma mater, causes their family supports, local charities
- Tax advantages - many donors benefit financially by giving away money to non-profit causes
- LEGACY: What they want to be known for when they are gone.
- BECAUSE THEY ARE ASKED

4. Begin By Saying Thank You

We all want to be seen, especially for our good works. Saying THANK YOU is the most profound warming technique in fundraising.

Thank donors and volunteers for specific actions:

- Serving on a board, committee or task force
- Hosting an event
- Making their first gift
- Recruiting a new volunteer
- Making an in-kind donation

Highlight the impact of those actions. For example: a better strategic plan, heightened visibility for the org, new revenue for important programs.

Call, write, text, social, sky writing. It doesn't matter what format you use - just say THANK YOU with authenticity.

5. Get Your Mindset Right

As a society, we're completely okay with investments in for-profit enterprises. Marketing budget, sales team, tech, bricks-and-mortar...all of these things cost money, and that's AOK. But what about our social services, justice, anti-racism movements, disease prevention, protecting endangered species, and all of the other important non-profit initiatives we rely on? Non-profits need massive investment just like our for-profit sector does.

Our job as fundraisers is to connect willing donors with important causes and ask for their investment.

That's a noble purpose, and you're here for it.

You can support the people and organizations who are changing the world through your fundraising skills. That's a unique skill-set, highly sought after in communities around the world. Non-profit organizations need people like you who know how to fundraise.

6. Keep Learning

Continue with the Fundraising Library for guides, videos, and templates for fundraising and donor engagement.

Explore the Fundraising Library

Questions About Fundraising Without Fear

How can I get more comfortable asking for donations?

Begin with your own relationship with the cause. Understand its mission, reflect on your own giving, and be curious about what a donor wants to accomplish through philanthropy.

Why should a fundraiser make their own gift?

Your own giving experience helps you explain how you made the decision, why you gave, and what the gift meant to you. The guide encourages a meaningful gift and recognizes several ways to give.

How do I begin a donor conversation?

Begin with a specific, authentic thank-you. Recognize what the donor or volunteer did and explain the impact of that action.

About the Author

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35 years leading advancement strategy across the nonprofit sector and more than $10 billion in campaigns. She guides teams through campaigns.

Your Next Step

Fundraising Strategy Session

Talk through a fundraising question with Anne. She'll help you make sense of the situation and decide what to do next. You get clear next steps, the replay, and a follow-up playbook.

Get the Next Guide in Your Inbox

Get Anne's newsletter on fundraising practice and donor engagement, with tools and resources to use in your work.

The Campaign Launch Lab, Spring 2027 Cohort

Your campaign, planned with Anne, executed yourself.

Build your campaign plan from start to finish, working with Anne. At the end you present your completed campaign plan to the cohort.

Online. Group meetings Mondays, March 29 to May 17, 2027.

Further Support

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