

The Ten Commandments of Fundraising

by Sam Schuchat (some point in the mid-1990s, with very slight edits by Jonathan Poisner in 2020)

1. People give money to other people

People rarely give money to abstract causes or institutions. They primarily give money to people that they know and trust. This is one big reason for Boards of Directors to make asks, as well as the use of celebrities.

2. People give money because they are asked to do so

Fundraising means asking people to give. People give when asked. You will rarely get anything you do not ask for.

3. The more direct the ask, the better

The best way to raise money is face to face with people you know. This is better than phoning, which is better than mail, which is better than email/text. The more personal ask, the better. This is a corollary to rule #1.

4. Always name an amount

People will almost never give more than they are asked to give; they will frequently give as much as they are asked to give. Naming an amount inspires confidence in the donor. The quickest way to get embarrassingly small gifts is to not name an amount.

5. The more money you ask for, the more money you will get.

Always aim high. You get only what you ask for, and the more you ask for, the more you will get. You can always come down from an ask/you can almost never go up from an initial (low) position. Nothing bad happens when you ask a donor for more than they feel they can give you. They just give you less than you asked for.

6. The more people you ask, the more money you raise

Your fundraising base is directly proportional to your list of prospects. More prospects means more money if you follow through thoroughly with the above rules. Fundraising is a numbers game: # of asks x % of yes's x average gift = \$\$\$\$.

7. Make it easy to give

Take checks and credit cards. Take money online. Use self-addressed stamped envelopes. Make sure you are ready to accept donations before you start.

8. Thank early and often

Thank people immediately, in writing, and personally. The more personal the thanks, the better.

9. You cannot have too much communication with donors

See #8 above. After thanking, stay in touch; make sure they know you are thinking about them and are always grateful and their money is helping.

10. The Eighty-Twenty rule always prevails

In almost any fundraising campaign for any amount of money, around 80% of the money will come from about 20% of the donors. Conversely, 80% of the donors will provide about 20% of the money. Alas, because fundraising is a numbers game you must ask for 100% of your list to get to the 20% of the list who are big donors. And many of the bigger donors in a campaign today are those brought in at a lower level in a prior campaign and cultivated (see rule #9) for a larger subsequent gift in a future campaign.