

Building Relationships

By John Elbare, the PG-COACH

A key to success in planned giving is building strong relationships with your donors. Avoid the common mistake of focusing on the gift instead of the donor. If you take a *donor-centered approach*, you will maximize your productivity.

This is not always easy. Far too many organizations focus on counting the gift instead of developing the donor. This short-sighted approach hinders productivity because it ignores the real needs of the donors. Instead, nurture each donor, as planned giving flows from donors who feel good about supporting a charitable cause.

Let's remember why donors arrange planned gifts. They care about your mission and trust in your organization's ability to carry it out. A planned gift is usually the culmination of a long-standing relationship with a charity that the donor has found rewarding and satisfying.

You can enhance that sense of satisfaction by building the relationship every step of the way. Once you acquire a new donor, begin cultivating that life-long relationship. Provide ample opportunities for involvement and clearly show your donors how their donations are used to carry out the mission. Organizations that do a good job of retaining and involving their annual donors are effortlessly building a wonderful pool of planned gift prospects.

The strongest predictor of a future planned gift is a donor's loyal, consistent giving, *regardless of the amount*. Make sure every donor is properly thanked and encouraged to feel a part of your family of donors. A recognition society for your planned gift donors is a great way to do this.

When you notice that a donor is giving consistently for a few years, or is getting more involved, call that donor and tell her how grateful you are for her support. See if you can drop by to thank her in person. Personally invite her to visit your organization for a tour or a lunch with your CEO. Get to know her. Build rapport with her by listening. Ask her about her life and why she supports your organization.

As you get to know her better, you will develop a good understanding of her values, why she supports your organization and what she would like to accomplish. Once you develop this level of relationship, you can quite naturally explore her interest in arranging a planned gift. You will be able to ask her for the right gift at the right time, because you know what she cares about. You can help her see how her end-of-life gift will accomplish her charitable goals.

Even after the gift is arranged, you must continue working on the relationship. Most planned gifts are revocable, so any donor who becomes dissatisfied can easily change the gift plan. You have worked hard to develop the gift, and you must continue the same process to preserve the gift. Make sure you treat your donors as VIPs. Keep making those calls and visits, so the relationship grows and strengthens. Remember, you are in a life-long relationship with each of your donors.

For more tips on successful planned gift development, visit our website: www.pgcoach.com

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