

Top 10 Reasons for Not Asking

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After the committees have been put together and the first fundraising meeting begins, that's when they start. You may recognize them as "yes, but . . .," or that old stand-by "let's not get too hasty" – "The Excuses" are a sure sign that your campaign leaders are nervous about getting started. From the sublime to the ridiculous, there is no shortage of creativity when "The Excuses" get started. Here are some of our all-time greatest hits:

1. They gave a big gift to our last campaign. We know they will give again.
2. They told us they wouldn't give to us again.
3. They just remodeled their house.
4. They have two kids in college.
5. They are going to / just got back from (insert expensive vacation spot here).
6. Their business isn't doing so well.
7. They don't have much money.
8. They are strange/odd/difficult to deal with.
9. They're just not ready! Let's do more cultivation.
10. They just gave to _____'s campaign.

The beauty of any of these excuses is – they are contagious! Once an excuse is accepted for a prospect, the door is wide-open to sing the excuses song for nearly every prospective donor on your list, building an enormous obstacle between your organization and its campaign goal.

Advancement professionals and volunteers alike can get side-tracked by the excuses. Avoid this pitfall and remain disciplined to pursuing stretch gifts from your best prospects by counteracting "The Excuses" with the following new tunes.

1. **"They gave big to our last campaign. We know they will give again."** Your past donors are your organization's best prospects. Do not take your past donors for granted, nor should you be reluctant to gain their early involvement and support of the new effort. Approach your top past donors with the respect and "insider" approach they deserve and make the solicitation a request, not a demand.

2. “They told us they wouldn’t give to us again.” While you must respect the donor’s sentiment, it is important that you continue to share your organization’s vision, plans and case for support for the new campaign. Such conversations often rekindle interest, sparking additional support. Often when prospects like these see others supporting the new campaign, momentum takes over and they will consider an additional gift.
3. “They just remodeled their home.”
4. “They have two children in college.”
5. “They are going to / just got back from (insert expensive vacation spot here).”
6. “Their company isn’t doing so well.”

These are among the favorite excuses used by volunteers and development professionals who are intimately involved with their prospects and the organization they serve. Familiarity with the prospects gives the fundraiser a reason to solicit them. The development officer needs to get on the prospect’s priority list in order to receive a significant gift. If the prospect has other known financial obligations outside of philanthropic concerns, then offer a back-loaded pledge to your campaign.

Regardless of the prospect’s current circumstances, resist the urge to take him/her off your radar screen. Remind donors like this that they are valued by the organization – regardless of the size of the gift they can give at the present time. By keeping the donor involved, you continue to develop the relationship. Good gifts, as we know, grow out of good relationships.

7. “They don’t have much money.” “Much” is, of course, a relative term. While it may be true that some members of your committee are overestimating a prospect’s capability, it is just as true that volunteers can be highly-sensitive about asking for a “stretch” gift from someone with whom they are familiar. Keep in mind that the type of car a person drives or the home in which they live should not be the only tool by which you or your committee estimate gift capacity. Many people who live in large homes have little disposable income. Conversely, a modest home or auto may indicate that your prospect prefers to use their resources in other ways – including charitable gifts. Help your committee over this hurdle by providing them with solid prospect research.
8. “They are difficult to deal with.” Yes they are. But their interest in your organization – their challenging questions, their quirky requests – makes them very likely to make a gift. Donor motivation is as wide-ranging as donors themselves. Take the time to listen and understand the prospect – anticipate their questions and concerns and respond to their requests. Once they feel respected, you’ll have a donor for life.
9. “They’re just not ready! Let’s do more cultivation with them.” Every prospective donor is different, but if your organization has moved toward its campaign in a logical sequence – using a feasibility study interview to gauge the prospect’s interest, circling back to them after the study to report the study results, keeping

them posted on pre-campaign activities – your prospect is likely to be ready. Keeping a prospect waiting too long can backfire – so once the groundwork is complete, ask for the gift!

10. **“Another organization is already asking them for a gift.”** There will always be other organizations asking your prospective donors for a gift. It’s important to keep your organization’s case in the forefront of the prospect’s mind and continue to keep your donors engaged in the mission of your organization. Rest assured that other organizations are not using your organization as an excuse not to ask.

Buying into excuses not to solicit a prospect can devastate a campaign. Resist the urge to join in the song and position your organization among the prospective donor’s priorities. The real “greatest hit” is the fundraising “oldie but goodie” entitled “Donors Give Because They Are Asked.”

For nearly twenty years, Bridget Murphy has dedicated her career to working with healthcare, hospital, religious, and social service organizations in achieving their capital campaign and development goals while identifying the strategic role of philanthropy in achieving these goals. Ms. Murphy has extensive experience in developing annual giving programs, major gifts, planned giving, prospect research, grants, special events, board development, and strategic planning. Prior to joining Graham-Pelton Consulting, Ms. Murphy was Vice President of Development for Monmouth Medical Center in Long Branch, New Jersey, where she directed and grew the fundraising program by 300% annually. Her tenure there also included a successful \$15 million capital campaign. As Regional Vice President of External Affairs and Campaign Director, Ms. Murphy assisted the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Health System in raising a Phase One goal of \$25 million as part of a system-wide campaign to raise \$100 million. Earlier in her career, Ms. Murphy spent five years as a fundraising and public relations consultant, where she provided capital campaign counsel and directed capital campaigns that raised more than \$145 million. The clients that benefited from Ms. Murphy’s counsel during that time include St. Elizabeth Hospital, Elizabeth, NJ; The Archdiocese Philadelphia; and the United Church of Christ. Ms. Murphy received a bachelor’s degree from the College of the Holy Cross and is a Certified Fund Raising Executive. For information on Graham-Pelton Consulting, visit their website at www.grahampelton.com.