

# Fundraising: How to raise a million without asking for a dime

The fundraising lesson is to learn how to ask without asking.

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People give to people for things they care about.

“People don’t give to causes. They don’t give to things. They give to people.” says Kathy Kingston, CAI, BAS.

Asking without asking is an approach that can work well in obtaining optimal donations for auction professionals who struggle with confidence in this area.

Many Auctioneers have a phobia of asking for donations due to multiple reasons. Some feel like they aren’t skilled, others feel like they don’t know how to ask the right people and some simply have a fear of rejection. But, according to Kingston, most people do not realize that you can ask for anything, and most of the time you can receive more than you expect.

When selling the idea of giving, the first sale is to yourself. In order to sell something to another donor, you must first understand why you are involved, why you have contributed funds, and what impassions you personally about that cause. Understanding this will help build a relationship with potential donors.

Building a relationship with donors is essential when it comes to benefit auctions and there are multiple ways to do so.

Find a common interest that connects you to your donor’s passion and then communicate the impact of their gift. Remember that it’s not about you as an Auctioneer, it’s about what matters most to your supporters. When you know what impassions a donor, that is when you get exponential giving.

When it comes to asking for contributions, use the “magic question” says Kingston. The magic question is an extremely effective way of asking donors:

“Would you be willing to consider \_\_\_\_\_ (be specific) so that \_\_\_\_\_ (communicate impact)?” Then hold the silence.

## Silence is golden

Holding the silence after asking is for donations is key. In fact, one of the biggest mistakes you can make as a fundraiser is not holding the silence long enough. Although it may be uncomfortable, a fundraising Auctioneer must be willing to stay

quiet – even for periods that can stretch to five or 10 minutes.

Why is this important? Just like in a negotiation, the first person to say a number often loses. The client could be thinking about giving more or less, how their funds are going to be used, or waiting to see what other donors give. Give them the time to do this.

And, don't get discouraged if a donor is not willing to participate during the event at that specific time. "No" often has various meanings.

## No is not a four-letter word

It is key to remember that objection often actually is a signal of interest. Listen more to what the potential donor is saying and ask if there is another dollar amount they would consider.

Regardless, communicating that you are thankful for their time whether they donate or not is important and shows that they matter to you as a donor. It can also encourage participation.

"The act of gratitude – immediate, true gratitude – is one of the greatest predictors of long-term donor retention," says Kingston. Auctioneers are the first level of gratitude, we are the second-to-last person to leave a benefit auction so take that time to personally thank clients.

Show gratitude for their time no matter what and follow up personally. Giving donors another future opportunity may be the push they need to give.

## Do good, feel good

There is a lot of neurological research on giving, part of which has uncovered the "mimic effect." Donors buy into the mimic effect in that when they see a bid card go up they are encouraged to bid as well. This is because the act of giving sets off hormonal responses that make people feel good. People like to give, and giving feels good.

Proof of this comes from the University of Oregon, where researchers used functional magnetic resonance imaging to show which specific regions of the brain were activated during an experiment on giving.

According to National Institutes of Health, "19 women received \$100 and were told they could keep whatever money remained at the end of the session. They then lay in an fMRI scanner for about an hour, while a computer screen displayed a series of possible money transfers to a local food bank. About half of the proposed transfers were voluntary – participants could decide whether to accept or reject the donation. In other cases, the proposed transfers were required, similar to a tax."

Receiving the money, seeing the money go to a good cause, or deciding to donate money — all of them activate similar pleasure-related centers deep in the brain.

Auction fundraisers can use these simple lessons and techniques to engage with and inspire donors to give. To engage donors, you have to be an expert in listening, asking questions, communication impact, funding a need, and giving gratitude. Doing all of these things can help you treat the moment as an invite rather than an ask, which helps both the auction professional and donors feel more comfortable.

"It's an honor to invite someone to give to a cause that impassions them so that they can make a difference," says Kingston. ❖

This article was an excerpt from a presentation given at the 2016 NAA International Auctioneers Conference and Show. Want even more tips regarding this topic? NAA members can access the full audio of this presentation and many others in the NAA Knowledge Center at [auctioneers.org/knowledgecenter](http://auctioneers.org/knowledgecenter).

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