

Requesting Major Gifts or “Major Gift Solicitation”

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Many of our clients make generous charitable gifts and contribute their time and expertise serving on the boards of nonprofit organizations. Serving on a board can be very fulfilling but frequently involves helping an organization raise money through major gift solicitation. Raising money is often new and intimidating, and can be quite stressful. To help reduce this stress, I want to share some tips.

Understand the process

Major gift solicitation is not begging. It is delicately presenting an opportunity for someone to share significant material assets, resulting in an intangible reward and sense of fulfillment for the donor, and make a noticeable difference for the organization.

Prepare for your meeting

When you meet with a potential major donor, use this mental agenda:

- Open with pleasantries.
- Get to the subject/topic. Don't waste his or her time!
- Make your request.
- Keep silent after asking for a gift. Let the donor respond.
- Be ready to address tough questions and negative responses.
- Always leave on a positive note.
- Follow up.

Guiding principles:

- The purpose of the visit is to ask for money.
- There are only three possible responses to your request: yes, no or maybe. Remember, “no” does not mean “never.” The timing or opportunity may just not be right.
- Talk about opportunities, not needs.
- Be sensitive to what your prospect is thinking. Watch for non-verbal signs as clues.
- Do not commit to anything you cannot deliver.
- Begin, be brief and be gone.

The best major gift solicitation is conducted by the right person, at the right time, for the right cause, at the right amount and in the right manner. As in all things, thoughtful planning makes all the difference. If you would like to discuss these strategies in more detail, please contact me by calling our Dallas office.