



Fundraising By Any Other Name

"Time-tithing" and other ways to get volunteers involved

Do you need more people engaged in fundraising activities on behalf of your organization? When you try to recruit volunteers for the task do you often hear: "I don't think I'd like a fundraising assignment?"

Many people express strong discomfort at the prospect of having to ask for money. How can you deal with this resistance?

First, the term "fundraising" is often much too general to communicate the work required. The image of raising money is asking someone you know for cash—and so it's not surprising that few volunteers warm to the idea.

In truth, fundraising has many possible components: grant writing, special events, corporate donations, direct mail, just to name a few. [The face-to-face solicitation that so many fear is generally only a small part of an agency's fundraising plan.]

If you are approaching a prospective volunteer, be clear as to what the work itself will be — and don't even mention the word "fundraising."

You can anticipate more recruiting success if you use an appeal such as: "Help us double the size of our holiday bazaar" or "spend a few hours immersed at the Foundation Center library to explore possible funders" or "visit three thrift shops and compare their pricing." These types of concrete tasks sound do-able and even enjoyable, especially if you individualize the assignment to match the skills and interests of the volunteer.

Perhaps your ultimate goal should be to increase your corps of "fund-finders"—people whose activities produce the by-product of revenue or identify potential sources of revenue. For many volunteers, the thought of generating money is very different than asking for money. So is doing the preparation necessary to help someone else ask for money.

It comes as a pleasant surprise to learn that fundraising really means discrete tasks such as research, writing, event planning,

hosting a party or selling something. "I can do that!" is often the welcome reaction to this type of recruitment pitch.

Another attractive concept is that of multiplying the effect of contributed time so that money is one of several results. Asking volunteers to plan and run a health fair to educate teenagers about potential health risks is a positive end unto itself. The fact that booth space can be rented to local companies or other agencies is a great additional goal. Generate other ideas for converting volunteer help into dollars.

Time Tithing

One creative and underutilized fundraising strategy is "time tithing." Developed by Ivan Scheier in *When Everyone's A Volunteer: The Effective Functioning of All-Volunteer Groups* (Energize, 1992), time tithing extends the concept of "benefit performances" by entertainers to all kinds of services for which a person might be paid; for example, conducting a workshop, washing cars, typing, doing chores, or professional services of any type.

Volunteers arrange paying work for a customer, but instead of keeping the money for themselves, time tithers have the amount, sometimes minus expenses, sent directly to the organization they wish to support.

In other words, they convert volunteer time into money for the benefit of your organization. (As Scheier notes: "A key consideration for the benefiting organization is that these services be of good quality.")

Originally conceived as a fundraising strategy for grassroots associations, the time tithing idea has intriguing implications for organizations of any size. For the "tither," this offers the advantage of being able to contribute to the organization without making a direct monetary donation.

In fact, the amount "raised" may be substantially more than that individual might be able to give outright in cash. It therefore

allows people with little cash to make contributions more equivalent to those with deep pockets.

In the United States, if the check is sent by the tither's customer directly to your agency, and your agency does not provide services or products to the donor, the amount donated need not be declared on the tither's income tax. By prior arrangement, the tither may divide the money and keep at least some of it (but that latter amount would be taxable to the tither).

As Scheier notes, time tithing has a number of benefits as a fundraising strategy:

- Time tithing gives people something relatively easy they can do to support you, unlike writing a grant or organizing an ambitious fundraising event.

For busy volunteers, even one day of tithed time can be an important contribution.

- You probably already have a core group of potential time tithers on which to build, in your key members, volunteers, dollar donors and board.

- You can build this core group steadily and easily, person by person, or group by group. You're not faced with periodic crises demanding severe extra time and effort drains.

- Once the time-tithed dollar flow gets established, it will tend to produce a relatively steady flow of funds you can pretty much count on rather than, say, a relatively risky once-a-year infusion of money from a fundraising event.

- Time tithers are quite likely to become even stronger stakeholders in the group through their contributions.

- You can reap these benefits without enormous investment of time, effort, skill, equipment, or money. Here is an idea that makes use of volunteer talent, yet radically alters the image of "fundraising."

Finally, keep in mind that only someone already devoted to your work is likely to be enthusiastic about finding ways to pay for it.

You cannot expect someone who knows little about your organization to begin contact with you as a fundraiser. Even at the top, board members evolve into loyal advocates only as they experience the value of the agency first hand. The challenge is to offer volunteers ways to contribute their time, skills and ideas with a service focus and perhaps a revenue-producing extra kick.

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