



# SEVEN SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL SOLICITATIONS

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

People routinely list “public speaking” and “asking for money” as the two things that they fear most in modern life, and yet soliciting a gift is at the core of what we do as fundraisers. Most of us never receive any explicit training on how to make a good ask, yet we are expected to be experts in this art. Many people think that good solicitors simply have a ‘knack’ for it; that you’re either good at it or you’re not. While it is true that some people instinctively know how to solicit well, like good writing, there are elements of the ask that can be taught, memorized, learned and brought forth at the right moment. This paper aims to make explicit some of those techniques that have proven effective so that the reader will have an arsenal of solicitation techniques at the ready to deploy as the situation demands.

## **II. SECRET #1: THE ROLE OF HOPE AND FEAR**

### **A. Fear**

Fear is a paralyzer. Hope is an energizer. Think about it: What are you really afraid of when you ask for a gift? Will it be the end of the world if the prospect says no? Sometimes it feels like it. Will you feel like you’re not a good enough fundraiser? Do you fear being a failure? Do you fear losing your job? Whether acknowledged or not, top of mind or back of mind, these fears creep into every fundraisers' consciousness and poison our best work by paralyzing us. If you don't make the ask, you can't fail at the ask. This is why so many fundraisers are hesitant to even try.

Once you acknowledge up front that this is your fear, it's a lot easier to overcome it with logic: "I won't be fired if I don't get the gift. Two out of three solicitation fail so even the best fundraisers get told no more than half the time" Wayne Gretzky, the hockey player, once said "You lose 100% of the shots on goal you don't take." Realizing you have to take shots on goal to get goals, and that some of those shots won't work out, can be helpful.

Even more helpful is to realize that when a donor says "no," it's usually because of something in her world, not yours. Maybe she's just taken a new position part time which will reduce her earnings. Maybe his job is in danger and he's not risking any large purchases right now, and certainly not a six-figure gift. Perhaps she's the head of a major campaign at another institution and she's in the fourth year of paying off a large pledge. Perhaps his critical 50th college reunion is coming up and he's hoping to be one of the campaign chairs, and knows he needs to make a large gift. Perhaps she's simply not philanthropic. The list goes on and on. You are not the center of your prospect's universe--they are. To paraphrase Humphrey Bogart as Rick Blaine in *Casablanca*, "*You and your little solicitation don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world.*" Once you realize that, it's a lot easier to face the rejection that will inevitably come, making it a lot easier to make the ask.

### **B. Hope**

If fear is a paralyzer, hope is an energizer, and when you have hope, you're one step away from confidence, which is the enemy of fear. How can you have hope? You practice it. One

of the things Olympic-caliber athletes do to ensure success is to visualize success. This carves neural pathways in the brain leading the body in the right direction. When the time comes, the athlete drops down into the deeply rutted pathway, hits auto pilot, and takes off for success. Similarly, if the fundraiser envisions a successful ask over and over again, it can help create a more positive outlook for the fundraiser which will be reflected when he makes the ask. When the fundraiser envisions a donor saying 'yes' to an ask, and feels the happiness the donor feels in making an important gift, making a difference, helping a charity she cares about, that will show in the fundraisers voice, carriage and body language. Success begets success. No one wants to say 'yes' to someone who is hesitant, cringing, apologetic, and reticent. Lead with confidence, joy, enthusiasm, and the prospect will more likely become a donor.

### **III. SECRET #2: GET YOUR PREP RIGHT AND THE REST FALLS INTO PLACE**

#### **A. Solicitation preparation**

Cultivating a prospect is a topic for another time and place. Let's assume you've done all the correct cultivation and you're on the brink of an ask for a gift. Preparing for that ask is a multi-step process, one that involves asking yourself, and answering, a number of questions.

#### **B. Goals**

The first question is "*Is your goal really to get a gift or not?*" So many fundraisers put an ask on the table, and immediately start asking the prospect if they can get them more information on the subject of the ask (a building, perhaps). Think about it: if the prospect needs more information, shouldn't that have already been given to him? Are you really ready to ask for a gift if you're still offering information? This is a self-delusional ploy that the fundraiser pulls on herself. It's a trick to buy more time. If you can put off the prospect making the decision by offering more information, then you can put off the moment she says "no" to you. You, the fundraiser, need to face up to the fact that your goal really is to get a gift, and you're not going to trip yourself up in that goal by putting obstacles in the prospect's way like fetching more information.

The second question is "*When do I want this prospect to make a decision on a gift?*" Figure out a general time frame and make sure you don't leave the meeting unless a time limit has been generally agreed upon by both parties. Often, fundraisers don't go into a solicitation with a goal of a time frame: they leave it up to the donor. Then it turns into a situation like that *New Yorker* comic of a man on the phone with a person he doesn't want to go to lunch with. He says into the phone "*When do I want to have lunch? How about never? Is never good for you?*" This is essentially what may happen if you leave the time frame open. The prospect never gets around to really considering your ask. He never discusses it with his wife. She never gets around to making a decision or pulling the trigger. Deadlines work. Use them (gently). Give the prospect a sense of when you'll get back to her in these sorts of ways:

*"Can I call you in two weeks to follow up?"*

*"I completely understand that you want to discuss this with your sister who's on the family foundation with you. When are you all meeting next? Not until six months from now? I see. Would it be possible for you to call Shannon before then to discuss it? Would that be comfortable for you?"*

*"You're leaving in a week for Martha's Vineyard? Oh, have a fabulous time, and eat at the Black Dog. Their bluefish is amazing. I hope it's a restful vacation. When will you be back? End of August? Terrific! Would it be OK for me to call you the first week of September to follow up on our request for a \$10,000 gift?"*

Let the prospect know you'll be closing the loop on this ask and that they do need to think about it. If you give them too much time to think about it, another organization can get in there and make - and close - the big gift you were hoping to receive.

The third question is *"When am I going to ask for the gift? At the beginning of the meeting to get it out of the way? After a bit of warm up? Or at the end when she's feeling all warm and glow-y from the visit?"* Well, the incorrect answer is at the end. Then there's no time to discuss the gift. How is she going to pay it? An outright gift or a planned gift? What is the time frame? What if the amount is too large? The questions can go on and on. It doesn't matter whether you ask at the beginning or the middle; what matters is that you get the ask on the table. Often what happens is a gift officer waits for the "right time." Like the aforementioned lunch date, when "never" is the right date for a lunch, "never" might also be "the right time" for the ask. Just do it. Many officers skirt around the ask, playing for time, pushing off the ask. Make a decision about when you're going to ask for the gift and stick with that decision.

The fourth question to ask yourself is *"What happens if s/he doesn't say 'yes' right away? What then?"*. Have no fear about this: the conversation almost certainly *will* wander away! Often the donor is stalling for time, trying to think about it. Sometimes they intend to say 'yes' and just haven't done so. Are you prepared to gently steer the conversation back again?

*"Hannah, I'd love to talk more about our financial aid policies, but a moment ago, I asked if you'd support our financial aid initiative with an endowed gift of \$250,000. Tell me, what are your thoughts about that?"*

Don't be afraid to steer the conversation back to the subject at hand. It's that simple.

### **C. Vectors**

After you've asked and answered your own questions, you have to strategize *"What's going to happen after I make the ask? How's it going to go?"* Hoping for success is not a strategy. While you may get a 'yes', the scenario in two out of three asks can be summed up in an old military saying: *"All battle plans are good plans until first contact with the enemy."* No matter how much you plan, there is no telling what will come out of your prospect's mouth

once you've put the ask out there. This is where vectors come in. You have to imagine all the different vectors, or directions, your prospect can go with your ask. There are innumerable places this can go, and you won't be able to imagine all of them correctly, but you can prepare for some of the most common ones:

- "yes"
- "no"
- "maybe"
- "I'd like to but..."
- "I'll need some time to think about this"
- "I'll need to talk this over with my husband/wife/family board/money manager/children/spirit guide/etc."

What's your answer going to be to each one of these? If you don't have an answer, you're not ready to make the ask.

### **D. Visualization**

One good solicitation preparation technique is to visualize *exactly* what you're going to say in the ask. Practice ahead of time either silently or out loud in the mirror. Visualize success: what is it going to feel like when she says yes? How are you going to respond? Go through the paces in your mind.

OK? I think you're ready to make your ask. Go ahead and do it!

### **E. Silence**

Ask for the gift and be silent after the ask. You may wait three seconds or you may wait as long as a minute, but remember, a solicitation is like tennis: you've just lobbed the ball into the prospect's court. It's her shot now. Let her take it, don't take it for her by talking. Let the prospect respond. Look attentive and respectful while you wait. Know that waiting 15 seconds in silence will feel like two hours. (Before the ask, you can practice waiting and counting the seconds so you get familiar with the agonizing feeling. Get comfortable with it so you are not tempted to break the silence.)

### **F. She says 'Yes'**

Congratulations! The donor said yes to the gift. Don't forget to say 'thank you.' Be enthusiastic. You'd be surprised how many officers forget to do this.

### **G. He says 'No' or 'Maybe'**

Respond to concerns and objections the prospect may raise. I'll cover more about how to respond to objections in the final part of this paper. If you need to let the prospect have more time to think, put a firm plan in place with specifics for follow up. Do not leave things open ended.

## IV. SECRET #3: SETTING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR YOUR ASK

### A. Catchphrases

Familiar catchphrases with which you feel comfortable can help you set a firm base for success, and they can allow you to practice the same wording over and over again, to carve the neural pathways of success. If you're familiar using something, then you'll be confident. If you're confident, you've got a better chance of success. Find something here that feels comfortable to your style and practice using it. You may continue using one or several of these catchphrases throughout your fundraising career, or you may simply need them as a 'crutch' until you get really comfortable asking for gifts. Here are some:

- *"I'd like you to consider a 7.8% gift annuity to provide you and Harry with the high fixed income that your muni bonds used to provide. A \$100,000 annuity will give you \$7,800 of income a year."*
- *"I'd like you to consider a gift of \$100,000."*
- *"It would be meaningful to your good friend Sam if you made a gift of \$10,000 to support the Crisis Center that we are trying to get off the ground."*
- *"Would you and your wife commit to \$5,000 to our alumni fund over the next five years?"*

### B. Put the dollar amount near the end or last

If you're asking the donor to do several things, such as host an event and make a gift, or become a campaign chair with several duties, and a concomitant dollar commitment, make sure you put the dollar amount at the end of all this confusing information. On the other hand, if you are OK with them ignoring everything you say after you put the dollar amount out there, then go ahead and keep talking about the event or the chair duties, because once they hear that dollar amount, their brain will start whirring and clicking, their attention will be diverted and they'll be focused on nothing else. Abraham Lincoln could walk in the room, offer to shake their hand, and they'd ignore him because they'd be in their own little world thinking "Geeze, that's a HUGE number she just threw out...can I do it?!....do I want to do it?...I really want to but how am I going to square this with my spouse after..." You'll be getting Abe's autograph and having a nice little chat about the last play he saw for about five minutes before your prospect's attention returns to you.

### C. Non-verbals

Non-verbal communication is crucial. Once, in a solicitation seminar I was leading, role-playing the prospective donor, the fundraiser made a beautiful ask, but immediately dropped her gaze from mine. The intensity of the question was too much for her and looking away eased the tension, but signaled to me instantly that she was uncomfortable, giving me as the 'prospect' pause; was she uncertain about the cause? Was she feeling guilty? What was wrong that caused her to drop her gaze? Just like in poker, players have 'tells' which give away their hand. This fundraisers' 'tell' was signaling discomfort. Keep

your eyes level with the prospect's. Project cool confidence, even if you're not feeling it. Fake it until you can make it.

### **D. Help your prospect!**

Gift planning affords the wonderful opportunity to frame your asks in a way that flows naturally; you're suggesting ways in which your expertise can help the prospect with a problem she's having. The meetings leading up to an ask can give you the raw material from which to fashion a 'helping ask'. Try a few of these:

- *“Wanda, I’m wondering if you’d like to take that IBM stock you just told me you inherited from your mother that is only paying 1.5% in dividends and turn it into something that generates a 7.5% income for you and Bob, without incurring upfront capital gain taxes from selling?”* (the gift annuity ask)
- *“Jerry, that house must be a real burden to you now that you no longer can spend hours at the seashore because of your recent skin cancer. What if you no longer had to pay the taxes and upkeep, but instead, received an income from it without having to rent it?”* (the charitable remainder unitrust ask funded with real estate)
- *“David, I understand your concern for Margaret since you’ve managed the money in the family and she’s not had to do the family investments before. What if we could insure that she received a high rate of fixed income as soon as you are no longer able to make investment decisions?”* (the flexible gift annuity ask with funding today, and the date of David’s death as the probable trigger date)
- *“Jenny, many of our physician and lawyer alumni are in the same boat as you: it’s difficult to save enough for a comfortable retirement with the 401(k) caps in place. Many of them have secured a fixed double-digit retirement income, and make a gift to our charity at the same time. Would you be interested in learning how this works?”* (the soft ask for information about a flexible gift annuity for a 40+ year old).

## **V. SECRET #4: USING URGENCY IN YOUR ASK**

### **A. The role of urgency**

It's not critical that your ask have an element of urgency in it. Many asks are successful without it. But urgency *does* play a helpful role in getting a prospect who is hemming and hawing to make a decision. For many donors, especially older planned giving donors, the key bugaboo you'll face is complacency. Urgency fights complacency and gives a reason for action - toward making a gift. Here are several ways you can weave urgency into a gift ask, whether for outright or planned gifts.

### **B. The matching gift**

A matching gift effort gives you a great relatively short window for action. Here's a way to amp up the effects of a matching gift effort:

*"Marcella, we have a terrific 1:1 match right now for gifts to financial aid. A minimum gift of \$25,000 will be matched with another \$25,000 for a total gift of \$50,000 for financial aid. It's been a really great opportunity that our alumni have been snapping up. We've had such a great response that we're actually getting close to using up all of the match funding. There are several other donors out there who are actively considering the match right now, and it's really a 'first come, first served' kind of situation. If you want the match, and I do hope you'll leverage a gift with it, I will urge you to act **quickly** as the funds may not be there much longer. What are your thoughts about a \$25,000 gift matched with \$25,000 for a total gift credit of \$50,000 Marcella?"*

Besides adding an element of urgency, what makes this ask click on all cylinders is the use of social comparison, showing that other donors are snapping up the match. Also, the fundraiser ends with a very specific ask amount (\$25,000) and spells out the total gift credit Marcella will receive. Lastly, the fundraiser makes it easy for the donor to answer with simply the word 'yes', by asking a very specific question.

An annual fund gives you urgency as you get to the end of the 365 day period. A capital campaign gives you the urgency of a gift being for a campaign purpose. This is why people do capital campaigns: it gives people a way to focus their attention on a purpose in a limited period of time.

### **C. Urgency using interest rates and tax laws**

Interest rates are usually either going up or down. When they're down, you can make the urgent case for lead trusts before they swing the other direction. Tax laws are often changing as well, giving you an excuse to ask for a gift before some advantage expires. Toward the end of 2012, here's what a fundraiser could have said:

- *"Charles, with interest rates at historic lows and the \$5.12 million gift exemption expiring at the end of 2012, you may wish to act now on the lead trust before your attorney gets too busy with others who are taking this opportunity"*

### **D. Urgency using discount rates**

Dropping discount rates give the gift planner another chance to add urgency to his ask. When you think you're coming close to the end of a window of higher discount rates you can say:

- *"I can offer this income tax deduction until the end of the month. After that, the deduction will probably drop."*

### **E. Urgency from mission**

Sometimes your mission offers ample opportunity for urgency, and this is a common situation when a charity wants to build a new building:

- *"Chris, if we can't get the lead gifts for the building, we won't take on the debt necessary to fund it. We've made the decision it's not financially prudent to debt*



*finance more than 40% of the construction cost. That's why the lead gifts like the one I'm going to ask you to consider are so crucial. Can we count on you for \$10 million?"*

**F. Paint a picture of the future with an urgent message**

Hinting at what might happen in the future if the prospect doesn't act soon can also have a motivating effect, as in this solicitation:

- *"Meg, I understand your concern for your mother since you've managed her money since your dad died. If you weren't there to care for her finances, she'd be in a real fix. What if something happened to YOU? A 9% fixed rate gift annuity could insure a high rate of fixed income for the rest of her life, no matter what happens to you"*

**VI. SECRET #5: USING LEVERAGE IN YOUR ASK**

**A. Leverage**

What is leverage other than the power to move something heavy more easily? An ask for money is hard. Having leverage on hand when you do this makes the ask easier - for both you to make, and for the prospect to say yes. Fortunately there are lots of levers out there. Here are the major levers (and individual donors have different triggers or levers that aren't listed here):

- Your organization's mission
- They want to be seen as a community leader/other prestige
- They have a passion for a particular project you want to undertake
- They believe in your leader ('ethos')
- They're undergoing a motivating tax event or life change
- They see others giving ('social proof')
- They want something by giving this gift
- They'll be embarrassed if they don't step up to the plate
- There's scarcity of some asset (a matching gift; the ability to have your name on your only college tennis pavilion and they played varsity tennis while at your college, etc.)
- Urgency: there's a time pressure

Figure out what is the lever for your prospect and work it directly into the ask. There could be one element, there could be multiple levers. Figure this out *prior* to the ask when you're in the preparatory stage so you can intentionally lean on the proper lever

**B. Using leadership as leverage**

This is a powerful tool when you have a prospect who wants to be seen as a community leader. Here's both a short and a long solicitation that uses that desire to be a leader as the lever:

- *“Jack, we need someone to get this cancer center underway, and I can think of no one better than you to inspire the rest of the board with a leadership gift that will set the standard for the rest of the donors to aspire to. Will you do \$2 million?”*
- *“Jill, we haven’t started asking for gifts for this upcoming campaign yet, so the first gift, the **trailblazing gift** is going to be a critical gift. It needs to be large enough to inspire confidence in the other close volunteers who are going to be -- LIKE YOU ---key in this campaign. We thought very hard about who would be the right fit for that trailblazing gift, that first gift that would inspire others to follow. It **has** to be someone that our donors respect. It **needs** to be a community leader at our institution. The gifts in the quiet phase set the tone and are the **cornerstone** gifts upon which all the rest of the gifts rest, so it’s crucially important to get the right donor. The dean felt **you** would be the perfect person for this, and we’d like to offer you the opportunity to be the standard bearer that all others will follow. Will you do that with a gift of \$10 million?”*

### C. Using mission as leverage

In the majority of cases, our donors are motivated by their passion for our organization's work. Where the donor is motivated by mission, talking about what the gift can accomplish, not about the gift amount, is effective. Below is a mission ask:

- *“David, if our goal is to cure skin cancer, we need to have these epidemiological studies. And if we want the best possible epidemiological studies, we need a longitudinal study encompassing 50,000 patients to get the kind of data that is meaningful, useful to not only our own scientists here at Charity X, but to the wider scientific community where they would help propel the field to the next level. You know what science takes, David and it won't be cheap. Will you do this to cure skin cancer David? We need \$3 million to kick this off.”*

### D. The 'buddy' ask or the 'ethos' ask

Sometimes, you may sit through an entire hour or two hour meeting just to say two sentences. That’s OK: they may be the most crucial two sentences of the meeting. This is an ask when you accompany the leader of your organization to a donor meeting and your role is to put the dollar amount on the table after she sets the grand vision. This relies on the 'ethos' of the leader. Ethos is the Greek word for a leader who embodies the values of the organization. At the higher levels, many gifts are motivated by a personal relationship with, and belief in, the ability of the 'top dog' to get the job done well.

- *“Mr. Snead, none of these programs Emily just described during the last hour can go forward unless we have the space to house them, and we cannot go forward on the new building proposed without a leadership gift of \$5 million. Will you do this for us and allow us to break ground on the Sam Snead Child Abuse Prevention Center?”*

**E. "Parroting": using the donor's own words**

Another lever is the tapping into the donor's own values and worldview, and there's no better way to do that than by parroting back to them direct quotes from your conversations with them. Do this by taking notes during previous meetings of especially resonate phrases or language they use when they seem quite moved or passionate about your organization. An ask using the donors words or values might look like this:

- *"Sarah, when we first met, you said to me "Anne, your organization turns people's lives around." And you were right; it does! We can change more lives, but to do so, we need a continual stream of funding, both now, and in the future. Can you establish a \$100,000 annuity to make a difference in an individual's life?"*

**F. Secret bonus tip! You know the expression "Seek and ye shall find;" now learn "Thank, and ye shall receive"**

Right before you ask a donor for new money, thank her for her past generous contributions. This reminds her of how she has supported your charity in the past. People like to be consistent with their past statements or actions. This is a very strong social construct, and invoking it can imbue the donor with a memory of why she supported you in the first place. Then, once she's feeling generous, pleased, and her commitment to your cause has been renewed, ask for a new commitment. That might look like this:

- *"Alec, Your last gift annuity of \$25,000 will allow us to keep the food pantry open for about a month! We'll serve about 1,500 clients with that. **Thank you** for your tremendous generosity, that will have such an impact! I'd like you to consider extending your impact with another gift annuity of \$25K this year."*

**VII. SECRET #6: SOLICITATION 301 - ADVANCED LEVEL TECHNIQUES**

It's best to master the direct solicitation first. Then, you can move on and work on higher level techniques and more complicated moves. These involve a variety of tools that the effective fundraiser has in her toolbox. One involves using physical 'props' (box charts and gift scales) to slip into the gift area you want the prospect to consider. Another involves verbal props or techniques: taking a number that the donor puts on the table, and 'walking' it up to a multiple of that figure. All of these can help the fundraiser feel more confident approaching the big scary number.

**A. The gift range history**

A gift range history is commonly used in academic contexts to show what other reunion classes have done at benchmark reunions (5th, 10th, 15th, etc.). 95% of the dollar amount of the chart is the top level gifts, showing the number of gifts at a certain level and what they totaled.: Here's an example of what part of the gift range might look like:

**Gift Range of 25th reunion: \$1 million raised**

<b>Dollar level of gifts</b>	<b>Number of gifts at this level</b>	<b>Total dollars at this level</b>
\$100,000+	2	\$225,000
\$50,000+	3	\$150,000
\$25,000+	8	\$235,000
	<b>13</b>	<b>\$610,000</b>

The top of the pyramid can be \$5,000 or it can be \$50 million dollars: the beauty of it is you can adjust the chart to fit the scale of your campaign. You might show tranches of gifts in the \$25,000 to \$100,000 range, then another set of three ranges from \$5,000 to \$15,000, then at the bottom, all the "other" gifts that make up the total from that reunion.

In a non-academic organization, you could create this for your last campaign when you are launching your next campaign.

The whole purpose of this is to visually demonstrate several things to a prospect:

1. People have made gifts at a high level before (this sets the bar high for the prospect in front of you)
2. If you want to make a difference, Mr. Prospect, you're going to have to shake yourself loose from your usual \$1,000 gift and step up to the \$10,000 gift level (or \$100,000 or \$1 million, depending on the scale)
3. The gifts at the top make the biggest difference

In the top example, if the campaign was for \$1,000,000, you can see at a quick glance (or the helpful fundraiser can point out to the prospect!) that the 13 gifts from \$25,000 - \$100,000 made up well over half the total campaign total. The message is "Go Big Or Go Home."

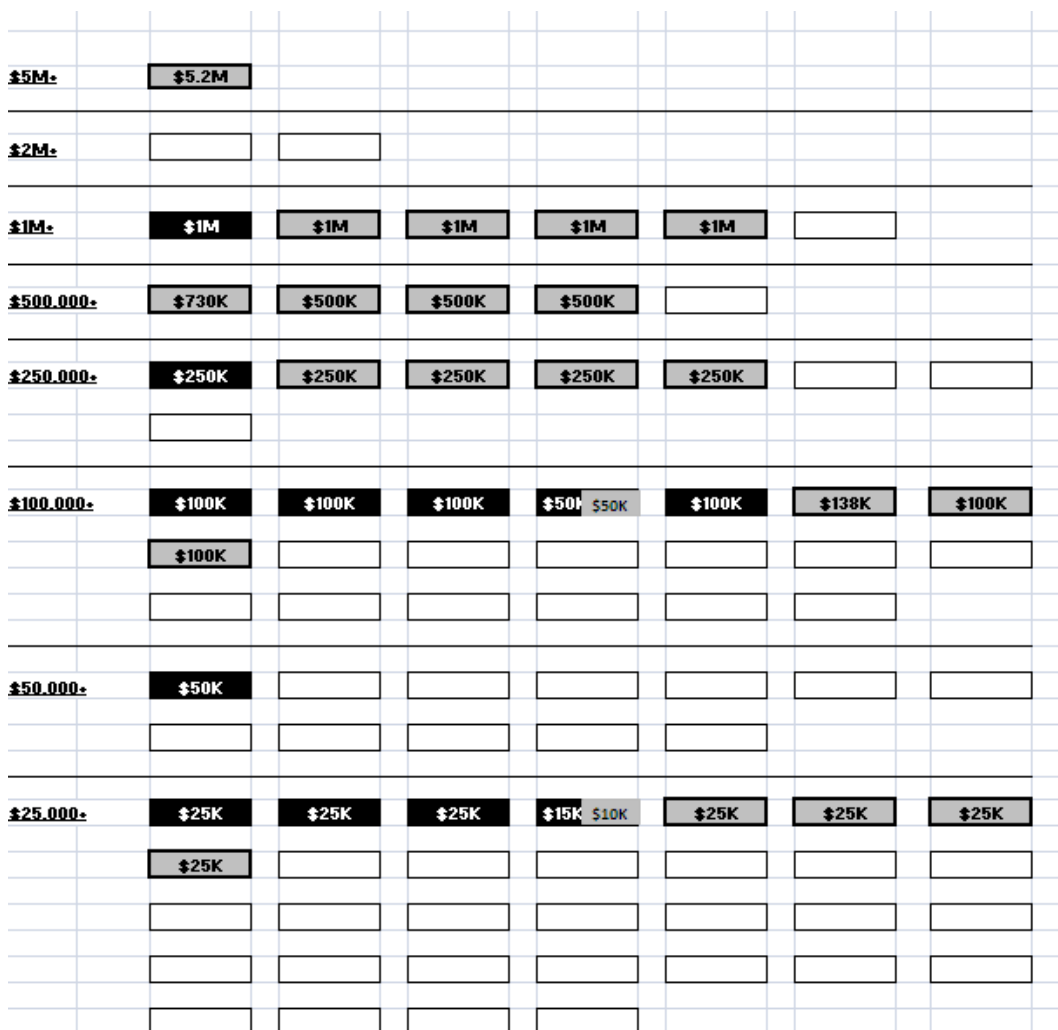
Using the gift range as a helpful prop (and sometimes having a piece of paper in front of you at a solicitation helps ease your anxiety), the fundraiser could say to the prospective donor:

- *As you can see from this chart, gifts at the \$25,000+ level really drive the campaign and make you a leadership donor" (leave it open for them to fill the void)*
- *" As you can see from this chart, gifts at the \$25,000+ level really drive the campaign and make you a leadership donor. Don, can we count on you to do this level gift? "*

**B. The box chart**

A box chart is another helpful tool for any type of charity. This is a variation of the gift pyramid. Each open box is a visual representation of the number of gifts you need at each level to make the goal. As the campaign/annual fund/reunion progresses, the open boxes are filled in each time a gift is received or pledged. You can even make variations, like

coloring the boxes black if the gift is current use and grey if it's an endowment gift, or one color for an outright gift and another for a planned gift or a bequest. The point is, the more boxes that are filled in, the more momentum you have generated and the more likely it is that the prospect will be swept up in the tide of gifts and make his or her own commitment. Like the gift range, the box chart also shows that people are giving at high levels, subtly (or not so subtly) signaling to your prospect that this is what is expected of her as well).



Using a box chart for annual fund or campaign asks lets the donor self-select where he sees himself on the pyramid. This not only allows the prospect to select the gift level that's feasible, but it raises the bar by allowing the donor to see what a leadership-level gift is in this particular campaign and what the lead gifts/pledges given so far look like.

A box chart can be harmful if the lowest stated gift level is too high for the prospect. Then it can be demoralizing when the prospect realizes she can't be a leadership level donor. When you are not sure, when you think the prospect may be able to stretch to reach the lowest level, you may choose to leave the box chart back at the office. Another way to

handle this solicitation would be to bring the box chart out at the solicitation meeting and try to turn a cash gift into a higher planned gift as follows:

- *“Linda, perhaps you can’t see yourself at the \$25,000 level in an outright gift. I can understand that: it’s a lot to give away. You need to keep your assets to produce income on which you live. But what if I could suggest a way for you to continue living off the income from your assets? In fact, I may be able to **increase** the income your assets provide, and allow you to make a meaningful \$50,000 gift to our charity to allow you to be a leader in our campaign. Would that interest you? (using stock paying income of 1% to 2%, converted into a charitable gift annuity paying income of 3%+)”*

### C. Solving a prospect's problem

This technique is especially effective in a planned giving context. You probe for assets during visits. Then, when you have gathered enough information and the time is right for an ask, you pose your ask as a tax or practical solution to challenges you've figured out the prospect might have. For example, instead of saying:

- *“Sal, I’d like you to think about making a gift of \$100,000 to our charity.”*  
say:
- *“Sal, now that your kids are grown and no longer use your ski condo at Sugarbush, and it’s no fun to rent it out each winter, would you consider gifting it in exchange for an income based on the sale value of the property?”*

This is a great way to ask for a unitrust, and you might get a lot more by doing that, than by asking for a straight cash \$100,000.

### D. Upping the ante

This can be a useful technique in a variety of situations, especially when the donor throws out a number before you solicit her. This is called ‘walking the gift up.’ In an annual fund situation, it looks like either of these:

- *“You can do \$25,000? That’s a terrific gift! Can you do that this year and for the next three years as well? That way, we can count you in our Leadership Circle as a \$100,000 donor”*
- *“\$10,000 is a fabulous reunion gift! Thank you. Would you be able to consider doing that each of the next five years? That would make your commitment total \$50,000. You’d be helping us to leverage even greater gifts from the community if you could do this.”*

In a planned giving context, it might look like this:

- *“Bob, \$25,000 is a great gift. If I could suggest a way to get you 7.6% income on some of the assets you might be using to make that gift, could you think about stretching the gift to \$100,000? I’m thinking that if I can help you replace and*

*perhaps increase the income you might be receiving from the underlying gift assets, it might be a win-win for both of us.” (a gift annuity)*

Upping the ante on a donor’s lower gift suggestion might also turn a gift into a larger planned gift in this way:

- *“Bob, \$25,000 is a great gift! Since I know you’re an aggressive investor. I’d like to suggest a slight twist: if you could receive an income on that gift with the possibility of growth over time, would you consider \$100,000 instead of \$25,000? I ask this because that’s the gift minimum for our unitrusts.*

**E. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush**

If you have a bequest donor, you have someone who has mentally assigned assets to your charity, as opposed to his children. It’s a short step from a bequest that will come in the future to a life income gift that comes to you today. Ask him if he would like to convert his bequest into a gift that pays *him* something!

- *“Tom, thank you for sharing with me that you’ve included our charity in your estate plans. Since you’ve already provided for your children through other means, and these assets will come to us eventually, would you be interested in “pre-funding” your bequest now if it could mean that YOU can enjoy an enhanced income from those assets today? We can discuss several ways I might be able to make that possible for you.”*

**F. The preemptive strike**

Sometimes a prospect can smell an ask coming, and undercuts you by offering a \$5,000 gift when you were going to solicit him for \$25,000. What do you do then? Upping the ante and walking the gift up can work well here. This technique was discussed above, and it’s particularly effective with the preemptive strike:

- *“Clementine! \$5,000! That’s terrific! Thank you very much! Would you be willing to pledge to do that for each of the next five years?”*

Another way to deal with the preemptive strike is to reframe the donor’s statement and provide more context that expands the donor’s horizons and raises the bar. That might look like this:

- *“Harry.....\$5,000! I’m delighted that you’re starting to think about your gift. Let me bring you up to date on what other donors like you are doing”*

(At that point, share a gift scale or box chart if you have it. Share stories of other similarly situated people are giving. After resetting the stage for what others are doing, continue the conversation and ask for a gift.)

- *“I know you’re thinking about the \$5,000 level, but it would be meaningful given what the others are doing if you could make a stretch gift and consider \$25,000”*

**G. Ask in English, not in 'planned-givingese' by using analogies**

It's so easy to fall into technical planned giving speak because we are comfortable with this language. Your prospects might not be. Think about it this way: would your average college sophomore understand what you are saying? If not, rephrase it. Here are some ways to translate our common planned giving vehicles into wording that non-professionals can grasp.

- *“Caroline, you mentioned having a block of appreciated stock that pays you 1.5% interest income. Think of that stock as a fruit tree, perhaps an orange tree. An orange tree produces oranges each year. Think of the interest income produced by your stock as the oranges. I have a way to allow you to keep the oranges from that tree for the rest of your life, and possibly increase the number of oranges the tree produces for you, if you agree to give our charity the tree.”* (gift annuity, deferred gift annuity, CRUT, PIF)
- *“Ivan, you mentioned having a family business that you want to pass on to your children. That business is like a fruit tree that produces fruit every year. I have an idea how you can keep that tree in the family which is your ultimate goal, pass it along to your children without any gift taxes, while giving our charity the fruit from that tree every year for a period of 10 or 20 years. At the end of that time, your children will receive the tree”* (the lead trust).
- *Sophia, I know you don't want to give up that valuable block of stock we talked about, you want to pass it along to your children. But I also know you want to help build our new center. What if I had a way for you to, in effect, 'lend' the stock to us for a period of 20 years, during which time we would use a certain percentage of income off the stock to help build the new center, and at the end of 20 years, the stock would be returned to your family, to pass to your children, without any, or with minimal, gift taxes? Would you be interested in hearing more about how that might work?”* (a lead trust).
- *“Isaac, the deferred gift annuity I just described is a great way for you to be proactive about your retirement planning and also keep supporting our charity at the level you'd like. If your concern is that you don't know exactly when you are going to retire, we have a simple option that allows you all the benefits of the deferred annuity, but it gives you the freedom to choose somewhere down the line which year the annuity starts paying you. You don't need to choose that now. AND it'll pay you a higher rate, the longer you wait!”* (the flexible gift annuity)

**H. The bequest ask is actually an open-ended inquiry**

Here's a great way to ask for a bequest:

- *John, Thank you for your support over the years. Many alumni who have given as generously as you have included our organization in their will. I'm curious...what are your thoughts on that?*



First, it thanks the donor and reminds him he cares about your charity. Second, it uses social proof, showing what others who care about your organization do. This gives him a guide post to what his actions are supposed to be. Thirdly, it asks an open ended question about a bequest. A closed ended question (one that results in a 'yes' or a 'no') is a conversation-stopper. Open-ended questions allow for a more nuanced conversation and one that continues, which is the most important thing. Lastly, you don't talk about death, dying, cutting your children out of the inheritance, any of that scary stuff that puts off major gift, annual fund and planned giving officers alike from broaching the bequest conversation.

### **VIII. SECRET #7: RESPONDING EFFECTIVELY TO RESISTANCE**

If you get the gift – Hooray! But success is never inevitable and you should always be prepared to deal with resistance. There are several effective techniques for this.

#### **A. Redirecting the Refusal**

'No' is rarely a 'no' to a successful solicitor. Often, redirecting the conversation can turn a 'no' or a lukewarm response into a 'yes,' especially if you pair it with the prospect's own stated values. Sometimes you can step back from the "no" and immediately try to reframe the discussion, using the prospect's own words and stated values:

- *“Alex, I'd like to take a few minutes to explain why the financial aid initiative is so important, especially since you talked to me so movingly about how critical receiving financial aid was in your own success in life”*

#### **B. Don't give in to the resistance: respond to it**

More often than not, a solicitation yields not a straight thumb up or down, but a conversation of sorts. A non-committal response is common. What differentiates the mediocre solicitor from the mega solicitor is how you deal with that resistance. The better solicitor will do the following:

- Ask questions
- Identify the prospect's concerns and address them
- Ask some more questions
- Draw the donor out to talk more about the concerns. Is it something about your organization or the project?
- Keep the conversation about the gift moving by....you guessed it, being curious and asking more questions. Keep going! You're bound to stumble on something you can grab onto that will help you turn this conversation around into a yes!
- Is the resistance more about the donor's situation? (With this, you have less control, but with a planned gift, you can change the type of life income gift proposed to alter the benefits).

#### **C. P.I.T.A**

When a donor says 'no' think of the acronym PITA and ask about each of these. Is the prospect's objection about the....

- **Project?** Would she rather fund something else?

- **Institution?** Is it simply that he isn't that invested in the charity? Maybe he's not interested in philanthropy at all, including your institution.
- **Timing?** Would it be better to ask in December when they make their giving decisions? Are they paying off a large pledge and need two more years before they can think about something like your request? Are they paying for tuition at a \$50,000 a year school and they love your organization and the project, but until they get their boys through college, they won't be making any large gifts?
- **Amount?** Is the dollar amount too large? Would another amount be more comfortable? This is the last question. You don't want to negotiate against yourself by putting this question any earlier than dead last.

### D. Pivot

Reframing the prospect's view of your charity is something you may need to be doing all the way through your cultivation, and sometimes up and through the solicitation. It's a matter of seeing the glass as half empty or half full. This is a topic for another time and day, but the short and quick of it is that there are several ways to pivot on a tough topic:

- Change the field of battle: change what the argument or objection is about by reframing it in another light
- Expand the frame of reference. When someone is objecting, go wider. Get away from the objection at hand by looking at the big picture
- Agree: never argue with the prospect. Find a way to agree with some part of what s/he says and add additional perspectives that turn the picture around to a more positive light.
- Shift to the future: blame lies in the past and present actions. The future has not yet happened and can't be argued about. Shift the discussion to what's possible in the future with the gift, not what has happened in the past

## IX. Closing

Becoming an expert solicitor often takes years of practice. Some people have an intuitive sense of how to get others to say yes to their requests, but for others, these are hard-won skills. However, the elements detailed here can be learned and used to shore up both the skills and the confidence of those fundraisers who aren't naturally blessed with native solicitation talent. The more you practice it in the field, or in mock solicitation situations, the more you will learn your strengths and weaknesses, and be able to build on the former and shore up the latter.