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RECOVERY

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IT'S THE INDIVIDUAL THAT COUNTS

by Founder and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ernie Fletcher

Everything's personal. Whether it's helping someone turn their life around or asking a donor for support, the cookie-cutter approach just doesn't cut it.

That was made clear in our June Webinar by Dr. Bill Stanczykiewicz of Indiana University's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Fundraising, it turns out, requires a good deal of detective work plus a master gardener's relentless attention to detail. It's not easy and one sure way to make it even harder is to make it only about the money.

Rural America is full of wonderful people and wonderful opportunities. We hope our work, including our webinars and newsletter, help the unique person you are to make the most of them.

Fletcher Group

The Fletcher Group Rural Center of Excellence

WHERE TO FIND DONORS

"Donors are individuals," says Dr. Bill Stanczykiewicz of the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. "That's why one-to-one contact is the key to successful fund-raising."

That applies even in lower-income, sparsely populated rural areas. "Program alumni and board members who've moved away can help you create a prospect list of outside donors, foundations and businesses, but don't ignore your own community," says Stanczykiewicz. "It's important to give everyone an opportunity to express their generosity, regardless of income level or gift size. People who see a genuine need want to help and feel part of something bigger than themselves. And when enough people begin to feel the difference they can make, even small donations add up quickly."

And the gift doesn't always have to be in the form of money. "In rural areas there are many ways to contribute, including the donation of crops, produce, and livestock."

A Single Slide
Stanczykiewicz credits a single PowerPoint slide for his success in taking a small Indiana non-profit from zero funding to a $6 million annual budget and $3 million in operating reserves. Under the headline, "The Six Right Things to Do" are these words: "The *right* person...asking the *right* person...for the *right* amount...for the *right* reason...in the *right* way...at the *right* time."

The Right Person
"It's never just one person," says Stanczykiewicz. "It's the entire board, all the staff, all the volunteers, even current and past participants. It's anyone who can identify the right person to develop a relationship with, make the call, and say, 'Hey, we could use your help. Would you be willing to take a meeting with our Executive Director, Board Chair, or Chief Development Officer?' Of course, scheduling a meeting doesn't mean you immediately get a gift, but it can start a relationship that eventually will."

The Right Amount
Tricks for finding the right amount include noting donor names and their fund-raising level—gold, silver, or bronze—at other fundraising events and looking at the annual reports of other non-profits. You can also talk to people who know donors. In rural areas, it's good to know who the largest land and cattle owners are and who's living a more lavish lifestyle.

The Right Reason
"Every supporter has a different motivation," says Stanczykiewicz. "You need to know their triggers and how to address them. It may be they're religious, it may be they want a tax write-off, it may be they lost a loved one. Whatever it is, you need to know it."

The Right Way
"Whether it's a year-end fund-raising campaign, a form letter, an email blast, or a public event, always take into account the personal motivations of your donors."

The Right Time
"The obvious choices are an annual fund-raising drive, a designated 'Giving Day' or a year-end holiday campaign. But when it comes to larger gifts, the timing needs to be more personal—when a donor gets a promotion or a raise, or the kids move out. The more you know about your donor, the more success you'll have.

DONOR STEWARDSHIP

According to Bill Stanczykiewicz, the most critical element in rural recovery home fundraising is "donor stewardship"—the periodic, personal communication that maintains meaningful long-term relationships. They're essential because year-to-year funding depends so heavily on repeat donations.

"If your stewardship is good, donors will continue giving with increasingly higher amounts," says Stanczykiewicz. "A donor who gives $100 a few times is inviting you to ask for $250 or $500. The same goes for those who repeat a gift of $1,000—they're signalling that it's time to ask for $2,500."

The Art Of Stewardship

Donor stewardship is done both formally—through direct mail, emails, social media, events—and informally through personal outreach. "Formal efforts include asking them to follow you on social media and following them back, making sure they've signed up for your monthly newsletter, and inviting them to events or a speech you're giving," says Stanczykiewicz. "It might be writing an op-ed in the local newspaper, talking on the radio or TV, or appearing at the county fair. Maintaining a public presence keeps donors from forgetting about you in a way that doesn't involve asking for money. The relationship has to be about something more than that."

Informal stewardship requires homework. "We can't meet donors person-to-person as much as we'd like so, when we do, we need to be as personable as possible. Make sure you know their name and repeat it throughout the conversation. Tell them how their gift is being used, the difference it's making in somone's life, and how much that person appreciates it. And be sure to ask how the donor's doing so it's not all about you."

All Hands On Deck

Non-profit board members are an especially rich resource. "We often have donor stewardship parties at our board meetings," says Stanczykiewicz. "We give each board member five to ten thank you cards addressed to potential donors and a script they can borrow from to write a personal message. Then we stamp them and send them off. We do the same with emails. We'll also take a 15-minute break in the middle of the board meeting and ask each member to call ten potential donors. It doesn't take very long at all since so many phone calls go to voice mail these days."

BILL STANCZYKIEWICZ

When donors hear a board member address and thank them by name it creates a strong impression because they know board members aren't paid and are taking time away from their own lives and families.

Honesty Builds Trust

Trust becomes even more important when times get tough. "Be as honest and transparent as possible," says Stanczykiewicz. "If a recession is making it hard on a donor, don't be afraid to mention your own challenges. Commis-erating with each other can create an enduring bond with long-term benefits for everyone."

WATCH THE WEBINAR!

To catch Bill Stanczykiewicz's complete webinar...

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HOW TO MAKE YOUR PITCH

Despite the digital revolution, many traditional ways of reaching people haven't changed that much, says Stanczykiewicz. Direct mail might even stand out more now because there's less of it. The same goes for cold calling. But regardless of the approach, the most important thing is tailoring your message to the audience. Stanczykiewicz remembers a millennial donor who told him, "Don't *ever* send me a letter." "So we made sure our communication with him was electronic. But other donors might want just the opposite. What's important is knowing and complying with donor preferences."

What's the Big Idea?
Of course, to customize a message you first need to have one. "That's where you need to think big," says Stanczykiewicz. "Saying, 'We give people shelter while they're recovering' isn't enough. You need a bigger, more compelling way to talk about yourself." His best example? The Southwest Airlines promise to give all people, regardless of income, the freedom to fly.

You can start your quest for the "big idea" by using data to describe the problem you're solving or the opportunity you're creating. "Maybe your county has more people in need of recovery housing than other counties, or your community lacks an important resource others have, or you have data showing that people with housing do better than people without it." Another technique is to focus on an individual client who met the challenge and whose story personifies the compelling idea that drives your organization. "It needn't be a 250-page dissertation, either," says Stanczykiewicz. "If the idea is truly powerful, it should take only a paragraph or two to express it."

Always present the big idea first before talking about the services you provide, the money you need to provide them, and the people you help. Documenting the latter with data or testimonials is especially important because donors, above all, want impact.

Personalizing Your Message
It's especially helpful to know what makes each donor care. Is it because of their religious faith? Did a family member go through the same program or deal with the same problem? Are they an employer looking for employees or someone looking for a tax break? It's best to know as much as you can about who's talking and why they're talking to you.

A good practice is to keep detailed notes on each donor and share them with board members, staff and volunteers. Those notes will also be helpful when it's time to put your big idea, your data and your testimonials in a grant proposal.

The Data "Sweet Spot"
How much data you include in your pitch varies from donor to donor. "If you run into a nerdy geek like me," says Stanczykiewicz, "you'll want to have a database or report on hand. But for everyone else, use just enough data to tell your story."

Don't Be Shy!
Becoming a public advocate can pay dividends, too. Research shows that writing a newspaper op-ed, appearing on TV or radio, speaking at events and meetings, or hosting a public event can greatly enhance your fund-raising potential.

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