



Ethical fundraising is easier

by Julie Mikuska

It's amazing how often we're asked if we take a percentage of funds raised, and how astonished prospective clients are when we say no, that happens to be unethical. Up until that moment, they have equated fundraising with sales, where the seller seeks to maximize profit.

Ethical fundraising is multi-faceted. It seeks to engage donors in long-term relationships that benefit both the donor and the organization. It is not focused on the "bottom line". It is transparent and honest. It does not look at donors as "low-hanging fruit." It is respectful.

The Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) has a [Code of Ethical Principles and Standards](#) that all members must annually sign. It has 25 ethical standards that members must meet. We are members, and we urge everyone who is in development to join.

But a commitment to ethics goes well beyond the development staff. In a culture of engagement and philanthropy, the CEO/executive director, board members, staff and volunteers must all learn about ethical fundraising and how it will, in fact, make it easier to engage donors.

So what does ethical fundraising look like?

- You look at potential donors as givers rather than a source of dollars. You focus on the person and their relationship to your mission.
- You make a personal gift before you ask others for theirs.
- You have excellent policies on privacy and confidentiality and you communicate them widely to staff and volunteers and to donors. You have regular training for anyone with access to personal information to prevent inadvertent breaches of privacy.
- You pay fundraisers a salary based on their qualifications and experience. You do not pay a percentage of funds raised as this leads to staff working in their own best interest rather than that of the donor or your organization.
- Your development staff (in fact, all your staff and volunteers) maintain a professional relationship with donors, and do not accept more than token gifts from donors (e.g. a meal).

- You do exactly what you've agreed to do with donors' gifts. If the original purpose of the gift is no longer relevant, you go back to the donor or their designate to change the use of the gift. If they disagree, be prepared to return the gift.
- Your board members, staff and volunteers disclose conflicts of interest. A conflict is not necessarily bad, but it is important to be open so that decisions are made on all the information.
- You give accurate information about the tax implications of donations and planned gifts, but you also advise donors to seek their own financial advisor's advice.
- You have a clear policy on gift acceptance that is understood by board, staff and volunteers and is available on your website. That way, you don't accept gifts that would have a negative impact on your organization's mission and image.
- You are honest and transparent about why you are soliciting funds and how it relates to your mission. You make sure all communications about fundraising are accurate and clear.

If you live and breathe ethical fundraising, your donors will thank you. And you can turn around and thank them.

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