

# The Technique of Soliciting Funds

by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

(A classic statement; reprinted and used by hundreds of institutions conducting fund raising programs.)

Perhaps the best way you acquire a knowledge of fund raising is to ask ourselves the question, "How would I like to be approached for a gift?" The answer, if carefully thought out, may be relied upon as a pretty safe guide to the task of soliciting. I have been brought up to believe, and the conviction only grows on me, that giving ought to be entered in just the same careful way as investing — that giving is investing, and it should be tested by the same intelligent standards. Whether we expect dividends in dollars or in human betterment, we need to be sure that the gift or the investment is a wise one and, therefore, we should know all about it. By the same token, if we are going to other people to interest them in giving to a particular enterprise, we must be able to give them adequate information in regard to it, such information as we would want were we considering a gift.

First of all, then, a solicitor must be well informed in regard to the salient facts about the enterprise for which he is soliciting. Just what is its significance, its importance? How sound is the organization back of it, how well organized? How great is the need? An accurate knowledge of these and similar facts is necessary in order that the solicitor may be able to speak with conviction.

It is a great help to know something about the person whom you are approaching. You cannot deal successfully with all people in the same way. Therefore, it is desirable to find out something about the person you are going to — what are his interests, whether you have any friends in common, whether he gave last year, if so how much he gave, what he might be able to give this year, etc. Information such as that puts you more closely in touch with him and makes the approach easier.

Again, one always likes to know what other people are giving. That may be an irrelevant question, but it is a human question. If I am asked for a contribution, naturally and properly I am influenced in deciding how much I should give by what others are doing.

Another suggestion I like to have made me by a solicitor is how much it is hoped I will give. Of course, such a suggestion can be made in a way that might be most annoying. I do not like to have anyone tell me what is my duty to give. There is just one man who is going to decide that question — who has the responsibility of deciding it — and that is myself. But I do like a man to say to me, "We are trying to raise \$4,000,000, and are hoping you may be desirous of giving blank dollars. If you see your way clear to do so, it will be an enormous help and encouragement. You may have it in your mind to give more; if so, we shall be glad. On the other hand, you may feel you cannot give as much, in view of other obligations and your desire to do your full share as a citizen, will be gratefully received and deeply appreciated." When you talk to a man like that he is glad to meet you again, and will not take the other elevator when he sees you in the corridor because you backed him to the wall and forced to give.

Of supreme importance is to make a pleasant, friendly contact with the prospect giver. Some people have a less keen sense of their duty and responsibility than others. With them, a little urging may be helpful. But with most people a convincing presentation of the facts and the need is far more effective. When a solicitor

comes to you and lays on your heart the responsibility that rests so heavily on his; when his earnestness gives convincing evidence of how seriously interested he is; when he makes it clear that he knows you are no less anxious to do your duty in the matter than he is, that you are just as conscientious, that he feels sure all you need is to realize the importance of the enterprise and the urgency of the need in order to lead you to do your full share in meeting it — he has made you his friend and has brought you to think of giving as a privilege.

Never think you need to apologize for asking someone to give to a worthy object, any more than as though you were giving him an opportunity to participate in a high-grade investment. The duty of giving is as much his as the duty of asking yours. Whether or not he should give to that particular enterprise, and if so, how much, it is for him alone to decide.

To recapitulate, then, briefly, know your subject: Be so sold on it yourself that you can convincingly present its claims in the fewest possible words. A letter may well precede an interview, but personal contact is the most effective. Know as much as you can about the man to whom you go to: Give him a general idea as to the contributions being made by others in his group, and...suggest in a gracious and tactful way what you would be glad to have him give, leaving it entirely to him to decide what he shall give. Be kindly and considerate. Thus will you get closest to a man's heart and his pocketbook.

## The Primary Reasons People Give

Because a peer asks  
Because of personal interest  
Because of personal involvement  
Tradition, religion, family belief, stewardship

## Words of Wisdom

Fundraising is very much like milking a cow. And you know it is difficult getting milk from a cow by mail or by telephone.

The principal reason people do not give: They are not asked.

Rarely do we know the donor's real interest...and often, when asked, he/she will tell us what they are.

If you are not going to ask for money, forget even trying to solicit a gift.

Be prepared to hear "No" as the first response to a solicitation. Ask again. Generally, the third "No" is the one that packs meaning.

Honor the donor by asking at the right level — at the level of the donor's perception of his/her own ability to give.