THE ART OF ENGAGEMENT

Most of our nation’s not-for-profit organizations eventually come face-to-face with a fundraising challenge… “*In order to secure meaningful gifts, we need to engage potential donors in meaningful conversations*.” When that challenge is faced by your organization, the following suggestions are offered in preparing yourself for meaningful conversations with potential major donors.

***Talking “Loud and Proud”***

Every person in a leadership position – volunteer and staff alike – should be expected to engage people in meaningful conversations about their organization; i.e. the people served, opportunities seized, problems addressed.

Public relations studies have shown that the average person has 200 to 300 personal contacts each year in the course of their personal and business lives. You can be assured that a handful of people that you talk “loud and proud” to about your organization will pass along some of what you expressed to others in their circle of personal contacts. And, the ripples go on!

***“Fast Facts”***

To most effectively talk loud and proud, you should be provided with “fast facts” that can quickly illustrate the essence of your organization’s mission, programs, and the value of gift support. Facts and illustrations that respond to fundamental fundraising questions:

“Why should anyone give anything, at any time, to your organization?”

*“What will your organization be able to do more of, or do better, or avoid the risk of eliminating as a result of receiving solicited gift support?”*

You should consider specific objectives for each personal engagement before meeting with potential major donors. Objectives to be considered before attempting to discuss a major gift commitment, for example:

* Identify areas of the person’s interest related to your organization’s programs and activities
* Evaluate his/her interest and financial capacity to make a major gift
* Determine the best person(s) to encourage a major gift at the appropriate time
* Consider possible gift terms and conditions based on a potential donor’s previously expressed wishes and circumstances
* Determine appropriate donor recognition for the gift

These objectives are not likely to be met in an initial discussion, and often take 6 to 18 months before you feel the potential major donor is ready to be asked for consideration of a major gift.

***Defining Your Role In A Gift Solicitation***

You may or may not be the person to personally solicit a meaningful gift from someone you have engaged in conversation. But if you have applied the *Art of Engagement*, suggestions and communicated results to others in your organization, it is most likely your good efforts will lead to meaningful gifts.