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Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Important principles of fundraising

By Barry VanderKelen

The opening of the school year is also the opening of the fall fundraising season. No clearer signal of this is the legions of scouts out selling popcorn. As I watched a couple of Cub Scouts knock on doors and ask people to buy popcorn, I was reminded of important principles of fundraising that all nonprofits can use.

1. Target your market.

Scouts target family, friends and neighbors to reach their goals; selling popcorn outside the grocery store is a bonus. Are you spending too much time on people who are removed from your mission?

2. Practice your presentation.

The most successful scouts follow a script they've written.

They've practiced it with their parents and try it out on people closest to them. Do you do this with your direct mail or in-person solicitations?

3. Get to the point. A picture states a thousand words and a scout in a uniform eliminates a lot of explaining. Are you presenting your mission simply and in a way that is easy to understand?

4. Focus on benefits, not features. To the boys, scouting isn't about popcorn; it's about the activities and trips. Few scouts are prepared or willing to talk about the difference between chocolate-covered popcorn and caramel-covered popcorn. Is your solicitation focused on outcome and impact?

5. Get to the point.

"Would you like to support my troop by buying some popcorn? No? Then how about sending some to the soldiers?" Is your solicitation this tightly focused?

6. Be persistent. Being rejected is hard to take. Parents are constantly reassuring the boys. How are you supporting and encouraging your board members and volunteers to stay focused and keep at it?

Nonprofits must constantly refine and improve their fundraising. "Borrowing" ideas from other groups is inexpensive and effective.

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Resource Use:

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

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Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes a bi-weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community.

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Each column is reprinted as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@slccf.org.