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Good Company

Business Investment in the Community: Great Return. An Update on United Way Campaign

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Convincing people to part with their money is never easy. Yet, year after year, United Way Chapters across the Country convince millions of business leaders, professionals and blue collar workers to do just that – contribute \$X per week to a system which primarily uses volunteers to determine which of the many deserving programs conducted by other nonprofit agencies should be funded. And every year before a sellout crowd of 700 or so, various companies, big and small, are given awards for their success.

Why should you care about running a successful campaign? All things being equal – persons who are generous with their money are generous with their time. The same employee that gives \$10 a week is also likely to work a little later when necessary for nothing – because both are the right thing to do. And, if properly presented, all of your employees should feel better about their jobs and more grateful after a United Way campaign presentation. After all, by virtue of having a job, having free access to shelter (the office) for 8 hours each day, having access to drinkable water and flushable toilets, each employee is better off than many others.

Running a successful campaign is no different than running a successful business. There are several fundamental principles underlying successful fundraising. Two of those are: know your target audience and always leave the potential donor feeling good after “the ask”.

Regarding the first rule, some companies succeed via incentives – a special parking space, paid time off from work, prizes, cash, or the opportunity to have the boss wash your car. You will know what most motivates your employees. Some companies succeed through guilt – the stories of a recipient of funds are very compelling. So, too, is the argument “you know you waste at least five to ten dollars a week...why not put it to a United Way worthy cause.” Encourage your employees to participate in the fund distribution process and days of caring to learn how much need exists in the Community and what great work is being done.

Rule Two – always, always make the person feel good after the ask. Be appreciative of their consideration of the request. Even if they give nothing, you’ve planted the seed; nurture it. Never set a minimum threshold. And, if you’re the solicitor, you should feel great after every “yes” whether it’s One Dollar or Ten Thousand Dollars. A community where everyone contributes One Dollar is richer than a community where one person gives One Million Dollars.

Another general rule of thumb – people give more to people than they do

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to causes. Admittedly, I am shameless. I literally go door to door to solicit the attorneys in this firm. I beg and I'm proud of it – there are so so many people who need our help.

For those of you who have formally participated in United Way campaigns, you know that it is a year long process. Watch for the opportunities – I have traded baby carriages and Red Sox tickets in exchange for the promise of a pledge.

Last, but not least, a solicitor is only as good as her or his commitment to the cause. You must believe in it. If you don't, find someone else in the organization who does to run the campaign.

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