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Planning & Running A Phone-a-Thon

by Susan Monce Brown

We are pleased to present the following article on phone-a-thons by Susan Monce Brown, who has tremendous experience in planning and running large phone-a-thons. For smaller scale phone-a-thons, readers are referred to Volume 2 No. 6, December 1983, "Introduction to Phone-a-Thons" by Susan Eisele, and Volume 3 No. 1, February 1984, "Using Phone-a-Thons for Renewal" by Kim Klein.

The Editors

A phone-a-thon is an effective, quick way to raise funds for a non-profit organization. The advantages of a phone-a-thon over other fund raising efforts stand out because of the amount of personal contact necessary during a phone-a-thon. When a donor is contacted personally, s/he is much more receptive to the organization and is less likely to say no. The volunteers are actively involved in your cause, and they are more motivated to contribute as a result. They pass this enthusiasm on to the people they contact.

The personal contact allows another major advantage. Unlike other types of appeals, an organization gets immediate feedback from the phone-a-thon. One can instantly see how effective the campaign is in soliciting funds without waiting weeks for a letter reply. If the response is not good the whole approach can be changed immediately and often until the desired response is obtained.

Besides the volunteer based benefits, there are many economic benefits of a phone-a-thon. Plain and simple, a phone-a-thon is an easy, effective way to raise money over a short period of time. The money comes immediately in a phone-a-thon. A day or two after the first calls the trip to the mailbox is filled with happy anticipation. The joy of finding a pile of checks is enough to raise any organization's spirits. Coupled with another happy surprise that happens often in a phone-a-thon when someone sends more than they pledged, a phone-a-thon can really brighten the work day.

As with everything worthwhile, a phone-a-thon takes a great deal of planning and preparation to make it work. Naturally, the first thing needed for a phone-a-thon is up to date records of alumni, subscribers or friends. There are several ways to update these files. The most accessible way is to use local phone books and city directories for the local donors. For those who are located elsewhere in the state, the telephone company many times has a collection of phone books that may be used. In addition, many local libraries have phone book collections, but be careful in using these, as many of them are out of date.

If you can't find what you need in the local phone books or city directories, use directory assistance. In some areas directory assistance within your own area code is subject to a charge. Long distance information is still free. Although the directory assistance calls can add to your phone-a-thon cost, consider the calls an investment because each number you discover is a potential donor.

Don't forget to make use of all your office resources. Past records can be updated often with a simple calling campaign to verify the information you have on file. Also, address correction requested stamped on your mailings will bring back a corrected address for a quarter charge. With a correct address, finding a phone number becomes a more simple task.

If you haven't already done so, try to include a spouse name on your permanent records. This information comes in handy especially in the case of women prospects because husbands' names are usually the only ones listed in the phone books.

When conducting a phone-a-thon, the least amount of information needed is a name and phone number. The caller can ask for address information while on the telephone, although this will slow down the progress of the calling. It is best to have the address in front of the caller and merely verify it with the donor.

Another major consideration that must be made before deciding on a phone-a-thon is the location. If there is a large room in your building that can be adapted to a phone-a-thon room, this is ideal. The advantages of bringing your volunteers into your organization to see your operation first hand are very great. Also, since the phone-a-thon will be in familiar surroundings you will be more comfortable. The advantage of not having to depend on the good graces of someone else in order to conduct your phone-a-thon provides security for future phone-a-thons.

Instead of using its own building, many organizations borrow a business from which to conduct their phone-a-thons. There are possible advantages to this procedure also, but they must be weighed carefully. The ideal business to borrow is one in which a large bank of phones exists in close proximity. Many times an organization will find a generous business that will allow free access to the WATS line, which will save phone bills. Do not assume this, however, or you could be in for a big surprise. Disadvantages of borrowing a business far outweigh the possible cost benefits. When an organization goes someplace else, it must worry about getting access to the building, work at the hours the business will allow, and worry about damage and unfamiliar surroundings while conducting the phone-a-thon. The organization is dependent on the good graces of someone else, and in case the business closes or the friendly manager is transferred, the phone-a-thon could die. In your own building, you are dependent on only yourself.

Equipment is another major issue that must be carefully considered. The options are to buy your own phones or rent them from the phone company each year. We have found the cost of renting the equipment a great deal cheaper for our yearly phone-a-thons. In our organization, purchasing the equipment would not be economically feasible at this time, since the only time we use a large bank of phones is during the annual phone-a-thon. To make the big investment and use the phones once a year is a waste for us, but this is a consideration that you will want to make yourself.

Equipment charges can be given to you exactly by the phone company representative. He or she will be able to tell you how much installation, line charges and rental will be for the organization. We found it cheaper to pay the one time line installation of $400, and then rent the phones and lines for a one month period each year for $400. This figure also includes a connection charge, but no installation has been paid since our first year.

Volunteers are the guts of your phone-a-thon, and no matter how well planned it is, if you lack volunteers your phone-a-thon cannot succeed. I found volunteers in many places, but I started with the alumni association, the group of volunteers that I work most closely with. I asked these people for their own help, and then for the names of the people they knew who could help. Then I contacted those people the first year and explained the phone-a-thon, and asked for their help. The second year, I asked the alumni association to draft the volunteers for me because all of them had been through one phone-a-thon, and understood how it worked. They had more success in drafting volunteers because they asked their peers for help.

Once the volunteers sign up, I immediately send a letter to thank them for their offer of help, confirm the time and place of the phone-a-thon, and give them additional information on why we're conducting a phone-a-thon. I also inform them that we will send a reminder one week before the work date, and phone them the day before they're scheduled.

A carefully trained volunteer is the most effective caller, and I do the training in two phases. As each caller arrives, I go over the information, guidelines and scripts with them individually. They seem to be more inclined to ask questions and express fears one on one. Then I leave the caller alone to review the brochures and material for a while. After all the callers have assembled, I go over in more detail the case, the procedures and even role play if they feel it is necessary. I always end with the statement that their first call will be their hardest and they'll be making calls like pros in a few tries. The looks of disbelief I get when I say that are always funny. A few minutes after the beginning of the phone-a-thon, though, the general hubbub always proves me correct.

It is very important to maintain a festive mood in the phone-a-thon room to keep up the morale of the callers. One way we do this is to stack the deck for the first few calls. Each caller is assigned two or three people who are considered excellent prospects based on their past giving and affiliation with the school. These prospects can be considered "sure donors," but the callers don't need to know this. After the first round of success, the caller feels confident and may choose any card from the record box for the rest of his/her calls. I have found that the whole mood of an entire phone-a-thon session can be determined by those first two or three calls. A happy session nets more gifts than a low key or depressing session.

Another way we boost morale is by offering a large refreshment table with various sandwiches like ham salad, egg salad, and barbeque, crunchies, fresh fruit, coffee and soft drinks. The volunteers feel appreciated even if they don't partake. Every half hour or so, the hostess for the

evening serves a fresh platter of sandwiches and takes orders for drinks. The volunteers don't lose their concentration to take a break, and they feel special because someone is waiting on them. Of course, if they feel the need for a break, they are free to go to the refreshment table at any time.

As the callers leave each night, I personally thank each one for his or her time, and again stress how much s/he helped. The next day's mail will contain a personal letter that tells, among other things, how the overall phone-a-thon did the evening before, and thanks callers for their contributions again.

The budget is a fact of life in fundraising, and a phone-a-thon is no exception to that rule. It is very possible to determine how much you will spend by knowing what you will need.

Budget

Stationery	$ 849.25
Phone rental & connection	$ 408.50
Long distance	$ 875.54
Postage	$1,004.22
Computer supplies	$ 174.00
Office supplies	$ 86.00
Food & drink	$ 200.00
Total	$3,597.51

Stationery that is all matched and professionally printed gives your donors the impression that your phone-a-thon is well organized and professional. The basics of the stationery should include an advance card that will inform the prospects that the phone-a-thon is coming up, a pledge card with matching return envelope, thank you notes and envelopes and reminders and envelopes for the people who delay their payment. A window envelope to contain the pledge card and return envelope is also a necessity. This material should be designed and ordered six to eight weeks in advance. The advance card should be in the mail two weeks before the beginning of the phone-a-thon.

Postage is probably the largest expense after the cost of the telephones. The advance cards can be mailed using a bulk rate permit. The pledge cards, thank yous and reminders must be sent first class mail because they have special message areas and different amounts filled in on each one. The post office defines this as first class mail. A good way I've found to estimate the cost of the postage, is to take the number of prospects and multiply by 49 cents (22 cents each for the pledge card and thank you, and five cents for the advance card). This estimate is naturally high because every prospect cannot be reached by phone. The additional postage, however, usually covers the cost of the reminders and leaves a little money in the account.

Office supplies needed include pens, scratch pads, paper clips, rubber bands, scotch tape, rulers, pocket calculators, phone books, donor cards, magic markers and poster board for thermometers. This budget item will be the smallest of your phone-a-thon budget, as most of these things should already be available in your office.

Although the installation and local phone costs should be a rate that you will discover in the early planning stages of your phone-a-thon, long distance charges are harder to determine. However, with the help of a very cooperative phone company representative, you can get the information in advance if you want to do the research. All you'll need to know is that the average phone-a-thon call lasts three minutes, and the areas you will want to contact. The representative will then be able to give you a rough estimate on what your long distance charges might be. Whatever you do, don't discard groups of distant donors to save money. As a rule, we have found that the further away we call, the more money the donor gives. The long distance calls pay for themselves beautifully, and you shouldn't worry about losing money on them.

In our last phone-a-thon we made 990 long distance calls to 46 states, 347 cities for an average of three minutes per call. Our total long distance bill was $875.54. From these calls we netted gifts of $14,107.50.

The set up of the phone-a-thon room is very important. The callers should all be within eye contact of each other, but each should have sufficient work space so that s/he doesn't feel cramped. Callers seem to be most comfortable with five to six feet of individual work space. They are close enough to other people to keep up morale, but they feel isolated enough to be themselves on the telephone. Each desk is equipped with the appropriate office supplies, a touch tone telephone, a record box of prospects and

A phone-a-thon is an easy, effective way to raise money over a short period of time.

an OUT box where cards from the completed calls are placed.

The office procedure during the phone-a-thon is the key to efficiency and quick dispersal of information. I have found it most effective to have at least five clerical workers per phone-a-thon session. Each worker is responsible for certain tasks, and nothing else. The set up is as follows:

Station 1—This person picks up the pledge cards and donor cards which are clipped together from the callers' OUT box. S/he then takes them back to his/her own desk and files them in his/her IN box. His/her responsibility is then to record the gift information from the pledge card onto the donor card. If the prospect makes no pledge, the clerk files the donor card and the pledge card into a clearly marked NO PLEDGE box. If there is a pledge the clerk transfers the information from the pledge card onto the donor card and passes it on to the IN box of the next station.

Station 2—This person keeps a running tally on the gifts pledged during the evening. S/he also checks the company of the donor and spouse on the donor card and then checks file for matching gifts. If there is a matching funds company, the clerk attaches the appropriate matching gifts form and info onto the pledge card-donor card pile and passes it on to the IN box of the next station.

Station 3—This worker checks the information on the pledge card and the donor card for accuracy, especially address information, then if all is in good order, separates the donor card from the pledge card. The donor card is filed in a box in front of him/her, the pledge card and matching funds form, if applicable, are passed on to the next station. This person is also responsible for updating the thermometer, and running miscellaneous errands.

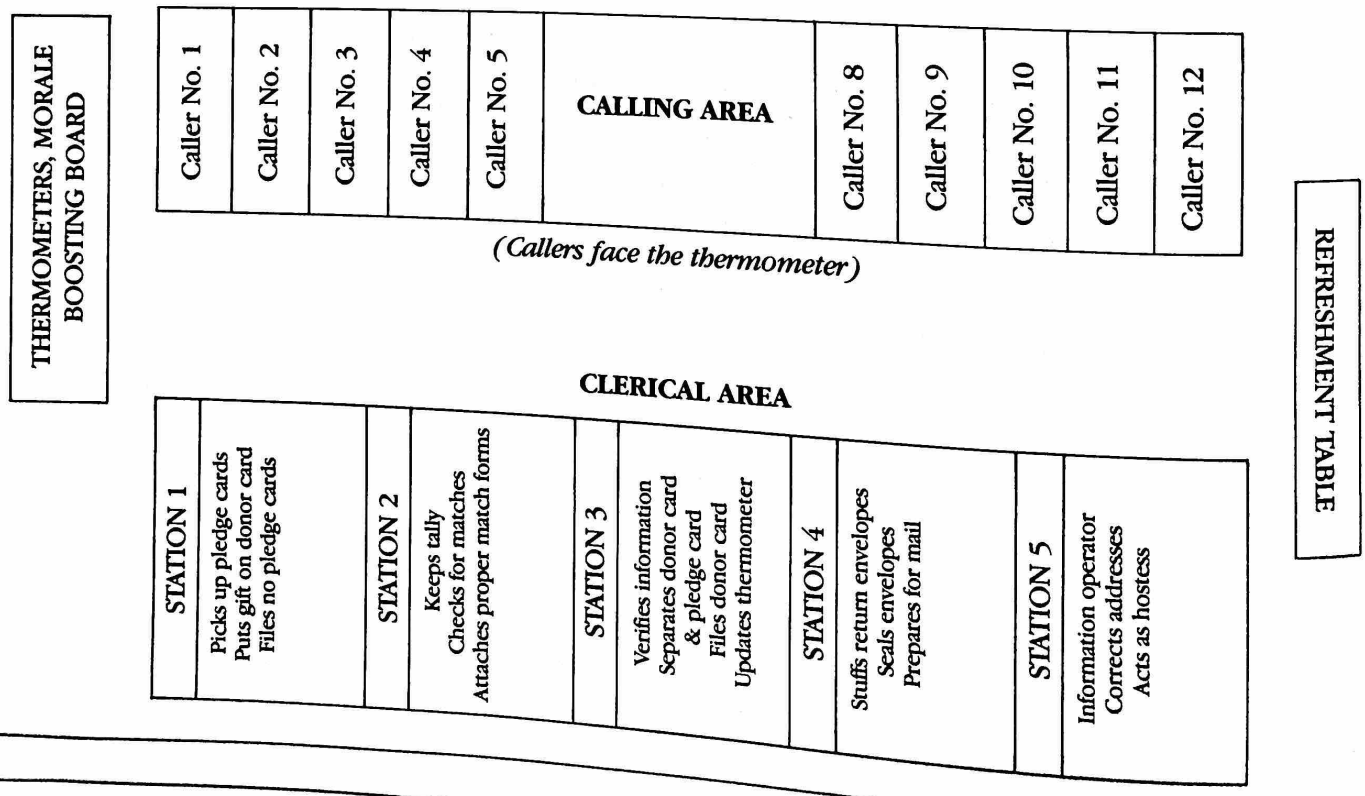
Station 4—This person stuffs the return envelope, pledge card, and matching funds form into the window envelope, seals it, stamps it, sorts for mail and bundles.

Station 5—This person serves triple duty as information operator, by correcting wrong phone numbers, typing correct addresses in case of change, and serving as hostess by offering sandwiches and drinks to the callers periodically during the evening.

The head of the phone-a-thon circulates all evening. The primary function is to answer the difficult questions that arise on the telephone, make sure that the office staff is functioning properly, and that all is going smoothly.

The day after the phone-a-thon, record keeping must be taken into the development office. The daily mail must become a priority during these phone-a-thon days. The daily receipts are entered onto an accounting sheet (the checks are again checked for verification of address, career and other little bits of info on them), and the checks are turned in to the school accountant. The pledge card stubs are taken to the computer, and each donor's record is searched and the appropriate information on the gift is entered. When all of the day's receipts have been computerized, the computer prints mailing labels for the immediate return of the thank you notes which have also been prepared

SET UP OF PHONE-A-THON ROOM



during the morning. A thank you is always in the mail within 24 hours after the receipt of a gift.

The use of a computer makes the phone-a-thon a streamlined pleasure. It can run labels, keep track of receipts, tally in a moment, and provide quick easy retrieval of alumni records and statistics related to the phone-a-thon. I highly recommend the use of a computer for a phone-a-thon.

After the phone-a-thon, a careful evaluation is necessary for wrap up and for the beginning of the next phone-a-thon. The computer is a very valuable tool to study the cost effectiveness of the phone-a-thon and the returns.

The advantages and benefits of a well run phone-a-thon make it, by far, my favorite fund raising activity. Many organizations use the phone-a-thon as the major fund raiser. At Assumption High School the phone-a-thon is designed to bring in hundreds of "small" gifts, those gifts of usually $100 or less from our alumni and friends who had never been asked to contribute before our three year old development program was initiated. Since it has been implemented, however, we realize the great potential of the phone-a-thon and plan to expand it every year until it becomes a much more major part of our fund raising program. The first year our goal was $10,000 and we netted just under $20,000. The second year our goal was $20,000 and we will reach at least $25,000 by the time all our pledges are paid. Next year we hope to raise $40,000 through increased pledge amounts from past donors, the addition of some "unknowns" and an expanded prospect list to include more than just alumni.

Besides the monetary benefits of our phone-a-thon, we have reaped tremendous participation increases from alumni who have been out of contact since graduation. The phone-a-thon call brings them back to school, revives happy memories, and has greatly increased our volunteer corps. I'm really sold on the phone-a-thon as a fund raising, organization building tool, and I firmly believe it can be a valuable fund-raising activity for almost any group. ■

Susan Monce Brown *is the Director of Development and Public Relations for Assumption High School, a Catholic High School in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin.*

Sample Handouts for Phone-a-thon Volunteers

Sample Script

Hello, this is _____ calling from Assumption High School for _____ (When prospect is on the line) Hello, this is _____ and I'm calling for the 1984 phone-a-thon at Assumption High School. We're raising money to supplement tuition, provide scholarships, refine the curriculum and help with energy projects. Would you consider a pledge this year to help us meet these goals? (Wait for reply.)

If YES, repeat amount and verify below information.

If YES, but no amount is volunteered ask "Did you have an amount in mind?" Enter the amount on the pledge card. If the prospect is uncertain about the amount, explain to him that we are keeping track of all th pledges tonight and you would like to add his pledge to the total. If he is still uncertain, fill in "your choice" on the pledge card and send it to him with an encouraging note.

Continue:
To keep our mailing lists up to date, may I please verify some information with you right now? Do you still live at _____?

Are you employed at _____ (read from card). If there is no company on the card, say "Many companies will match the contributions of their employees. Are you employed? What is your company name?"

Thank the prospect for his/her support and tell him/her that a pledge card will be in the mail tomorrow morning. Say goodbye.

Sample Script to Verify Info before Phone-a-Thon

Hello, Mr. _____ I'm calling for Assumption High School. We're in the process of updating our alumni files and we would like to verify some information with you right now.

The address we have you at is _____. Is this correct?

Are you still employed at _____ as a _____?

Have you been receiving Alumni mailings?

Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding Assumption that you would like for me to pass on to the administration here?

Thank you very much. Goodbye.

Sample Handouts for Phone-a-thon Volunteers

Procedures

Make call and ask for alumni. If you reach parents of student no longer living there—get correct phone number and write it on donor card.

Use script leads.

Verify address, phone number, and get occupational information. Make all changes or corrections on label on donor card.

What to do when:

You get a pledge for definite amount

1. Enter amount on pledge card and write short note on card.
2. Clip pledge card and donor card together.
3. Place in box on your desk.

You get a pledge for uncertain amount

1. Write "YOUR CHOICE" on pledge card in amount space.
2. Write a short encouraging note like:
   Dear Tom,
   Great talking with you tonight. I know you will do what you can for Assumption.
   Jack Smith
3. Put "WILL CONSIDER" and date on donor card.
4. Place in box.

You get a "not now"

1. Fill in Donor's Giving Record like this:

Donor's Giving Record

Date	Fund/Purpose	Contact	Amount
1984	Phone-a-Thon	Your Name	

2. Place in proper receptacle.

There is no answer or line is busy

1. Put card on bottom of pile and try again periodically. If you cannot reach your prospect by the end of the session return the donor card with the notation "couldn't reach on *date*—(line busy) (no answer)." Put this in empty yellow section under average gift. Place card back in donor file to call another night.

You get a call back request

1. Get a definite time to call back (2/2-9 pm) and write it on the card in empty yellow section under "average" gift.

Guidelines

Purpose

1. To give volunteers, alumni and parents a sense of involvement with Assumption High School.
2. To begin an annual giving program and increase the number of alumni and parent gifts.
3. To update the alumni population through systematic record keeping.

Goals $20,000

Where the money will go:

The cost of education rises every year, along with the cost of living. Tuition and fees cover only 37% of the actual cost of educating a student and for this reason, Assumption must explore other avenues of fund raising.

The AHS Development Office was created three years ago to find additional sources of funding.

The Royal Club, The Royal Event, and The Annual Sale are all examples of these additional resources.

With these funds AHS can:

- ☐ become more energy efficient through fluorescent lighting, new thermal windows and weatherstripping
- ☐ add advanced placement courses in many areas
- ☐ add to computer center on third floor
- ☐ maintain and increase business and vocational courses like shorthand, typing and home economics and art
- ☐ sponsor a retreat program and liturgy prayer sessions for students and faculty
- ☐ encourage spiritual counseling within a youth ministry program
- ☐ introduce computer literacy in major courses
- ☐ implement curricular improvements for below average students
- ☐ expand tutorial services through the use of the computer
- ☐ develop an equipment replacement program for all extra curricular activities
- ☐ develop a formal fund raising program to meet with the extra curricular budget
- ☐ implement a transportation cost reduction program
- ☐ install storm windows in gym
- ☐ install mechanical louvers for boiler room draft
- ☐ increase scholarships for students at AHS
- ☐ keep cost of tuition down for all students

When Money Isn't the Problem

Most non-profit organizations need more money than they have. To increase their funds, they either seek new strategies for raising money, or they strive to upgrade their existing strategies. A significant number of non-profit organizations that think they need more money actually have any number of other problems which must be solved before their fundraising efforts can improve. In fact, these organizations sometimes have an effective fundraising program in place, but their other problems obscure its success.

Because most organizational problems affect money coming in and going out, people often blame their fundraising efforts for their shortage of money. But just as a fever can be a symptom of any number of illnesses, so lack of money may point to a deeper distress. Rarely is lack of fundraising effort the main problem in a faltering organization, and never is it the only problem.

In this article, we will use several short case studies to explore four of the most common organizational problems. In each case, the problem appeared to be a lack of money and the solution appeared to be more or different fundraising. In fact, when the problem was properly identified, the solution was unrelated to fundraising. Here we present the solution to each problem chosen by the group in question. Other solutions were also possible, but you will see that the creativity applied in these instances generally resulted in positive solutions for all concerned.

Problem Area One: Organization sets goals that are unrealistic

Example A: A sexual assault prevention project faced a $14,00 shortfall in their community-based fundraising efforts. They described the reason for this deficit as always falling short of their fundraising goals. Their paid fundraising coordinator was depressed, feeling that no amount of work made any difference. Their fundraising plans, and past performance looked like this:

Source	1983 Actual Income	1984 Actual Income	1985 Goal	1985 Actual Income
Raffle	$ 2,500	$ 3,000	$10,000	$ 6,000
Membership	1,500	2,000	10,000	6,000 (so far)
Major Gifts	5,000	8,000	15,000	11,000 (so far)
Volunteer Canvass	3,300	3,500	8,000	
TOTAL	$12,300	$16,500	$43,000	$29,000

Real Problem:

The real problem is easy to see. Having showed steady financial growth for two years, the group decided to hire a fundraising staffperson to increase their income even more significantly so that they could expand their program. They then set goals that required raising two or three times more than they ever had. The effect of the staffperson was clear. Income in every category had gone up, and total income to date in 1985 was nearly double that of 1984. However, the goals that had been set were unrealistic. Once they realized that just needing the money for a more ambitious program was no reason to think they could raise it, they were able to adjust their goals.

Solution:

The group revised their goals downward, and postponed the beginning of the new program until 1986. Far from feeling discouraged about their fundraising, they realized that their decision to hire a fundraiser was a good one, and that their efforts really were paying off.

Example B: A Peace Center planned and organized an event to protest U.S. involvement in Nicaragua. A demonstration would be followed by a small concert featuring a local bluegrass band. Admission to the concert was $5. They hoped to attract 1000 people, making their gross income $5,000 and their net income about $3,000.

They planned to raise even more money by selling drinks and food at the concert. Because they were so caught up in the preparations for the demonstration, they decided not to advertise the concert widely, but to try to attract most of the demonstrators to the concert. The demonstration went well. About 2000 people came, the press gave it good coverage, and there were no problems with police or bystanders. The concert, however, did not go as well. Though the concert was mentioned several times during the day, and fliers about it were distributed, only 500 people came. With sale of drinks and food, the concert netted about $750, less than one-third of the hoped for total. The problem was blamed on poor publicity.

Real Problem:

The real problem here is again an unrealistic goal. This organization, with only one part-time staffperson, set itself up for failure by planning a major demonstration and a major fundraising event for the same day. They saw the demonstration and the concert as related events, which would naturally flow into each other. In fact, this was not the case, Having spent their afternoon at a demonstration which ended at 5 p.m., most people were not going to turn around and go to a concert beginning at 8 p.m.

Solution:

The solution here is for the group to identify what they want from their special events. When money is a primary goal, they must give the money-making event enough time for proper advertising and coordination.

When a good time for the demonstrators, plus publicity for the group is the primary goal, then the concert needs to be at the end of the demonstration. The demonstrators could march down Main Street, and rally at the City Park, then be entertained by the blue grass band, and then go home. Poor publicity for the concert was only the symptom of the problem.

Problem Area Two: Organization maintains incompetent or unqualified staff

Example A: An environmental organization needs an accountant. With money coming in from many sources, including foundation funding for several projects, they need someone who can keep careful track of both project funds and operating costs. The brother of a Board member needs a job and a change of pace. A car mechanic by training, he has recently been the manager of a gas station. No one on the hiring committee has accounting skills, and needing an accountant quickly, they decide not to do a full search, but to offer this man the job. Reasoning that he can add and subtract and has small business experience, they foresee no problems.

During the annual audit, the organization learns that foundation money given for a special project has been used to pay operating costs. The cash flow generated by this grant has disguised the lack of money coming in from other sources. The project to be completed with this grant is now jeopardized.

The Board decides that they have slacked off in their fundraising efforts, and resolves to make up this deficit.

Real Problem:

While the Board's decision to increase fundraising is certainly commendable they will find themselves in this situation or worse until they deal with the fact they have an unqualified accountant. They either ignore or may not realize the serious legal problems that can arise from "co-mingling" funds. They risk alienating the foundation funding the project, and destroying their reputation by not finishing their work on time, or by news of this mistake leaking out.

Solution:

The accountant is happy in the job and everyone likes him. They choose to pay his way to attend night classes in accounting and to hire a consultant to set up the books and supervise him for a few months. Although these were extra expenditures for the group, they felt it was worth while to retain a basically good employee.

Example B: The Director of a group advocating for senior citizens in a small city has worked there for ten years. With three other people, she is one of the founders of the group. The organization is highly respected, and she is a dynamic and capable leader. Last year she developed a debilitating kidney disease which leaves here exhausted much of the time and has affected her short term memory. This disease is progressive, and will eventually result in her loss of kidney function and require dialysis. She has cut back from her more than full time schedule to three-quarter time, and even then can usually only work three-four hours a day. Her memory loss has caused her to miss important meetings and some appointments with donors. She insists that she is fine, just tired, and that her missed meetings are the result of having too much on her mind. No one wants to talk honestly about her illness, and so the other two staffmembers are trying to do the Director's job as well as their own. Everyone has a "wait and see' attitude. One Board member sums it up, "I suppose one of these days something serious is going to happen, but we will cross that bridge when we come to it." Meanwhile fundraising efforts are beginning to fall off, as the Director's lack of energy makes it impossible for her to keep up with her work.

Real Problem:

Here is a classic problem that most often occurs with alcoholism — everyone, including the ill person, participates in denying the illness, hoping against hope that somehow it will all work out. This is a misplaced sense of kindness. There is, in fact, nothing kind about standing by watching the organization this woman has been instrumental in building slowly fall apart because she can't continue to

do her work. Further, Board members fail in their responsibility to act in the best interests of the organization by not dealing with the situation.

Solution:

Two of her closest friends and co-founders of the group spent an afternoon with the Director and a therapist specializing in the needs of people with debilitating or terminal illnesses. The Director was able to admit that she feared she was indispensable, and also that she was having difficulty adjusting to her disease. In addition, she needs her salary to pay her increasing costs related to her illness such as special food and a housecleaner. A solution to all these problems was fairly simple. The Director qualifies for disability insurance and can cut back to half time without any loss of income. Another staffperson will be promoted to half-time director. The current Director will begin phasing other people in to her meetings with funders and donors. It is imperative that this organization have more people doing fundraising so that the task does not fall solely on the Director. Chances are with this decreased work load and decreased worry load, the Director will be able to stay with the organization as long as she wants.

In these two examples, and dozens of others, people are given or retained in jobs for reasons that have nothing to do with the job and which ignore the health of the organization. "He's in therapy," "Her relationship just broke up," "He's a single father," "Her mother has cancer" are not job qualifications. Obviously, social change groups want to be more humane than corporations or businesses seem to be. But giving people too much latitude is neither good for the organization nor kind to the person. These crises usually show up in lack of money. More money will only buy time and extend the crisis for more months.

Problem Area Three: Poor recordkeeping

Example A: A women's health organization has a mailing list of 1000 names. To be on the mailing list, one pays organizational dues of $20 per year. Every September, the volunteer fundraising committee sends out renewal letters to the entire list, then committee members take turns coming in to the office for the next twelve weeks to thank the donors and add them to the mailing list. No records are kept of the date or amount of the gift. Over the past three years, income from the membership list has dropped while the cost of maintaining the list has risen. The committee's solution is to recruit more paying members, and they plan to launch a large direct mail campaign.

Real Problem:

The volunteers who send the mailing and maintain the list have no agreed-upon system. Some volunteers sending thank you notes add everyone to the list without checking to see if they are already on it, creating duplicate listings. Only one volunteer checks the accuracy of the addresses on the list. In two years, no name has been removed from the list because no one looks for lapsed members. The renewal sent in September goes to everyone, even if they just joined in August or July. Angry letters from donors are filed away in envelope marked "To be answered," then never are.

Solution:

A consultant was hired to draw up a series of procedures for each volunteer to follow. Without experience in managing a mailing list, most had never realized their mistakes. The list is small enough that a computer is not needed at this point, and the group chooses not to go that route. Instead a second list is started noting the name and address of the donor and the date and size of their gift. Renewals are now sent out quarterly, which decreases the work in September and makes for a much higher renewal rate. All lapsed donors can now be recontacted, and eventually removed from the list. In a list of 1000 people, in fact only 390 were paid up; 200 were duplicate names; and more than 150 were wrong addresses. With a simple five step procedure, any person wishing to volunteer can immediately be plugged into mailing list tasks. The savings in time means that the fundraising committee can now launch its direct mail campaign without compounding their problems.

Example B: A legal aid organization publishes three booklets on various aspects of legal rights. The books are priced to realize a slight profit, and an excellent marketing strategy is implemented. The booklets sell much better than expected. The secretary cannot keep up with the orders. There is no system for keeping track of orders needing to be filled or those that have been filled. As she fills an order, the secretary simply throws away the order form. Checks are often not cashed for three or four months, and the wait for booklets becomes four weeks, then six weeks, and finally three months, resulting in a number of angry letters. The Director decides the sales are not worth the effort and suspends the marketing plan. "It will be easier to get the money from a foundation and give the books away for free," he says.

Real Problem:

Here the Director decides to abandon a successful fundraising strategy and community service because he doesn't know how to put proper recordkeeping procedures into place.

Solution:

A Board member who runs a retail store intervenes. She helps the secretary set up a system of inventory control, recording orders, and coding checks for deposit. She suggests having mailing labels printed with the organization's return address which saves the secretary hours of typing the return address on blank labels and gives a better look to the organization. A work study student is employed three hours a week to fill orders.

Problem Area Four: Intolerable working conditions

Almost all low-budget organizations make do with less than adequate working space—conditions are often too crowded, too noisy, too dirty, too cold in the winter, too warm in the summer. But some make do with conditions that rival the garment industry of the 19th century or the living conditions of many migrant workers. Ironically, they will work in conditions they would protest vociferously if they found them among workers in other industries.

Example A: A tenants' rights organization with two staff people operated from a cabin-like shed in back of a block of stores. The cabin measured 9' x 12', was uninsulated and had no running water. (They used the bathroom of a nearby gas station.) Heat was provided by a woodstove in the center of the floor. Light came from one bare bulb and electricity was provided by a neighbor through a series of extension cords. In the winter, a staffperson came in early, built a fire and went home for an hour while the office warmed up. The workers and the Board felt strongly that the organization should be located in the neighborhood it served and should not be fancier than the living conditions of many of the tenants. They proudly brought donors to the office to show that no extra money was spent on frills, and felt their limited success in raising money was due to the bias of the donors toward what they were trying to do.

Real Problem:

Here the problem is one of assumptions: the first assumption that anything but near-squalor would call the organization's sincerity into question; the second is that donors are biased against them so their chances of raising big money are slim. A compounding problem is work time lost in preparing the feeding the fire, and in staff absenteeism for almost constant colds and flu through the winter. The organization was finally forced to face the problem when the fire department declared the electrical system inadequate and ordered the landlord to upgrade it, which he refused to do. This forced the organization to move.

Solution:

The organization moved to a small office in a neighborhood church. They pay little rent, as the pastor of the church is sympathetic to their goals. They have access to a photocopy machine and a conference room for meetings. They are warm in the winter and cool in the summer. At the same time, they have maintained their goal of staying in the neighborhood, and not living better than the tenants they serve. They agreed to give up their assumption about the bias of prospective donors and to try that avenue again. It was pointed out to them that while many wealthy people are not sympathetic with their goals, those who agreed to visit them and wanted to learn more about their work were probably not of that crowd. Their income from this source has significantly risen in the year they have been in the church. Those most supportive of the move: the tenants who are the leaders in the organization.

Example B: A child care center operated its program in a large barn. In the back of the barn was an office which has previously been a horse stall. The barn had been converted into a wonderful, if slightly noise classroom. The horse stall did not convert so easily into an office. The noise from the classroom was deafening for the administrator, so she normally came in late and worked well into the evening, after the children had gone home. Her office was overcrowded, and because it did not lock, she often found that children had been playing in it. Although she asked several times for an office away from the facility, the Board felt it was an unnecessary use of money, and that all extra funds should go to the children. As time went on, funding deadlines were missed, letters did not go out on time, and a major block of funds from the state was almost lost because of failure to comply with reporting deadlines. The administrator complained of overwork, and having no time to do fundraising. The Board proposed hiring someone part time to help her. This person would share her stall.

Real Problem:

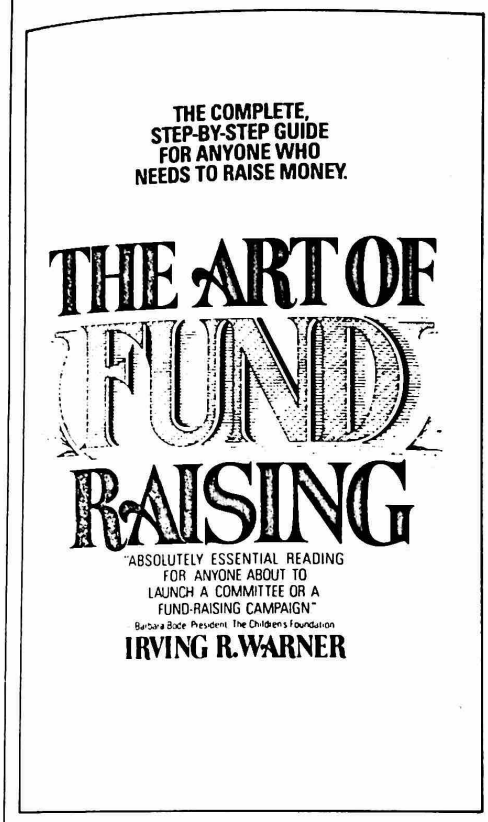
This administrator may be overworked, but there is no way to know how much is due to her working conditions. She works mostly in the evening, which she resents because it has adversely affected her personal life. Because she often cannot be reached during normal business hours, she has frustrated and annoyed funders, government officials and donors. The problem finally came to a crisis when she came in one day around 4 pm to find the Annual Report, typed and ready for proofreading, covered with a rapidly melting chocolate bar.

Solution:

The Board agreed to take the money they were prepared to use for an assistant to rent an office space away from the facility. They and the administrator will now be able to see if she truly has too much work. This decision resulted from the Board realizing that the good of the children would best be served by making it possible for the administrator to do her job.

Summary

Groups often find it liberating to learn that their problem is not money related, and can be solved through means other than simply raising more funds. It is sobering to realize that when the problem is not money related, no amount of money will solve it. All organizational problems must be examined from a variety of angles, both to accurately analyze the problem and to be sure that all solutions are being considered so the best one can be chosen. ■ KK



The Art of Fundraising
by Irving R. Warner
Bantam Books, New York, 1984,
163 pp., $3.50

The Art of Fundraising was written by an individual who brings 35 years of fundraising experience to bear on the topic. He has worked in seventy two cities across the North American continent and his clients have included religious groups, public interest causes, private hospitals, think tanks, colleges and universities. The diversity of his experience is evident in this little paperback, pocket size manual on fundraising.

The Art of Fundraising is a little like a cookbook written by a gourmet chef who has dabbled in the cuisines of the world. The transition from one chapter's train of thought to the next is never terribly apparent. The degree of thoroughness with which topics are explored is not entirely consistent. But for the cook who is not sure just what s/he wants to create, this is a good place to begin.

This is a chatty book which makes it easy to read and often very entertaining. It is written primarily for the "amateur volunteer," but often the use of the term "you" can be confusing, as some of the activities described are more appropriately delegated to staff rather than volunteers. Nevertheless, by directing his thoughts to "you, the volunteer" the author has written a very direct, and often very opinionated survey of fundraising.

The bulk of *The Art of Fundraising* focuses on what this journal often refers to as major donor campaigns. It is the direct, one-to-one solicitation of a large gift from an individual. Because of the rambling quality of the writing, this is not the greatest "how-to" guide on developing such a campaign. But the author touches on the most important aspects of running a campaign, which makes the book good reading for someone in a slump about a campaign failure or someone who has just begun to consider the concept.

The one limitation of the author's handling of major donor campaigns is that it seems directed to the fairly wealthy large organization or institution. The reader working with a small community organization will probably feel after reading the book that major gifts campaigns are not for his/her organization, mostly because s/he does not have access to powerful wealthy people in his/her community. That assumption is not necessarily correct. If readers can ignore this line of thinking, however, there are many other interesting items in the book.

The best parts of this book, in addition to the discussion of major gifts campaigns, are the little personal experience stories, which are good examples of what works and what does not work in different kinds of fundraising efforts, and a chapter called *Cliches, Chestnuts and Caveats.* Within this chapter are some extraordinary tidbits of fundraising advice and commentary. A few examples:

"Psychologists suggest light blue may be the color people respond to best in a fundraising context."

"In families of great wealth, the founder of the fortune and his grandchild will usually be more generous than the generation in between."

"If every man, woman and child in the United States sent you $1 and asked for a receipt in response to your fund-raising letter, you'd spend more than you got."

"Never tell a prospect your organization might collapse without his help. He might let it. Nobody likes to think his money could go down the drain."

There are also some strange comments such as:

"People who get angry when asked to contribute to a worthy cause probably kick their dogs."

"When you plan your big fund-raising dinner, leave out the soup. It will save you money; it will save about fifteen minutes for your program; the soup will probably be cold anyway; and if the crowd is big enough, somebody is bound to get soup dumped in his lap. Besides, wealthy prospects don't come to fund dinners just for the meal."

Returning to the analogy of a gourmet cook book: *The Art of Fundraising* is eclectic. On some topics it provides enormous detail, on others it simply lists the ingredients but now how to put them together for a finished product. It touches on events, direct mail, and publicity and deals in depth with issues about leadership.

The book's organization is so complicated that it is impossible to describe. This makes it not a very good resource to return to in the middle of a fundraising project; there are many other excellent books for that purpose.

It is not a must-have, but it is not a must-miss either. If one were seeking a classification in a book catalogue, *The Art of Fundraising* might be found under the "easy reading" listings. The two audiences for this book are the individuals who have never done any fundraising who will find the chattiness and broad survey effective and those who have spent years fundraising, have read all the journals and books that have come out and are interested in some new ways of saying old thoughts or new perspectives on experiences they may have had.

LH

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The American Association of Fund Raising Counsel (AAFRC) has released the total figures for private sector giving in its 1984 Annual Report, *Giving USA*. According to the report, giving by the private sector to non-profit 501(c)3 organizations came to $74.25 billion in 1984. It is important to note that this represents only giving to 501(c)3 groups, and does not include giving to lobbying organizations or any group that does not have official tax-exempt, non-profit status. Giving was as follows:

Total Giving 1984: $74.25 billion

Contributions (in billions)		*Contributions as Percent of Total*	
Individuals	$61.55	Individuals	82.9%
Bequests	4.89	Bequests	6.6%
Foundations	4.36	Foundations	5.8%
Corporations	3.45	Corporations	4.7%

Distribution (in billions)		*Distribution as Percent of Total*	
Religion	$35.66	Religion	47.9%
Health & Hospitals	10.44	Health & Hospitals	14.0%
Education	10.08	Education	13.5%
Social Welfare	8.01	Social Welfare	10.8%
Arts & Humanities	4.64	Arts & Humanities	6.2%
Civic and Public	2.08	Civic and Public	2.8%
Other	3.44	Other	4.7%

Overall, giving increased by 11.1%, meaning that with inflation at 4%, real growth of 8% was realized. Of course, even this dramatic increase in funding (the total $74.25 billion is more than double that contributed just seven years ago) cannot make up for the cuts in government spending. According to Lester Salamon of the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., federal budget cuts proposed for 1986-1988 would reduce support for programs of concern to non-profit organizations by $55 billion. Taken together with funding losses which began in 1981, a further reduction on this scale would bring to $108 billion the aggregate loss attributable to federal program slashes over the past four years. (All information taken from *Giving USA*, a 110 page publication which provides in-depth analysis of major trends in philanthropy, as well as interesting information on the major recipients of philanthropic dollars, such as churches [by denomination], the United Way, universities and hospitals.)

Giving USA is available for $25 from AAFRC, 25 West 43rd St., Suite 1519, New York, NY 10036.

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