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# ASK WITHOUT FEAR!



A SIMPLE GUIDE TO  
CONNECTING DONORS WITH  
WHAT MATTERS TO THEM MOST



MARC A. PITMAN

# IS FUNDRAISING FUN FOR YOU?



Are your board members beating down your door with new donors that are ready to make a gift? If that's not your reality yet, *Ask Without Fear!* by author, speaker, and fundraising expert Marc A. Pitman is for you!

In this fun, easy-to-read book, he:

- EXPLAINS IN A STEP-BY-STEP, EASY TO REMEMBER PROCESS HOW TO BUILDING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR DONORS - AND HELP THEM CONNECT WITH YOUR CAUSE IN THE WAY THAT MATTERS MOST TO THEM!
- IDENTIFIES TIME-TESTED RESEARCH TOOLS TO HELP YOU PLAN YOUR FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN!
- EXPOSES THE 7 MOST COMMON FUNDRAISING MISTAKES - AND HOW TO AVOID THEM!
- SHOWS HOW TO BECOME SKILLED AT IDENTIFYING A PERSON'S PERSONALITY TRAITS AND TAILORING YOUR MESSAGE TO FIT THEIR PERSONALITY - EVEN ON THE FLY!

*Ask Without Fear!* helps you move your fundraising from a static, one-way, organization-centered monologue to a dynamic, donor-centered, two-way dialogue. Whether you work for a not-for-profit or volunteer for one, this book gives you the tools to raise serious money for your favorite cause!



"Get REAL" will take on new meaning for board and staff members who read this book. Readable, on point, filled with memorable stories and well-tested practices, this little book is a great addition to the field of pragmatic advice to those looking for more successful engagement in fundraising."

- **Kay Sprinkel Grace**, *Principal, Transforming Philanthropy and author, Beyond Fundraising*

"I enjoyed 'Ask Without Fear!' Marc has taken a subject that has been written about often and given it a new twist. Clearly, his effort is a work of passion and love. My hat is off to him."

- **Jerry Linzy**, *Senior Managing Partner, Jerald Panas, Linzy & Partners*

"Marc is a skillful and knowledgeable coach, and a true expert on fundraising. He provided very helpful fundraising advice to a nonprofit where I serve on the board. If you need someone to assist with any area of fundraising, Marc is your guy!"

- **C.J. Hayden**, *Author, 'Get Clients Now!'*

"This short, practical book gives you a series of step-by-step methods to raise more money, faster and easier than you ever thought possible."

- **Brian Tracy**, *Author, 'The Psychology Of Selling'*



**Marc A. Pitman** is the founder of [fundraisingcoach.com](http://fundraisingcoach.com) and the creator of the popular *Creating Donor Evangelists* Audio Program. Convinced that "fundraising is an extreme sport," he has raised millions of dollars for education, arts, and healthcare organizations. A popular speaker, a skilled coach, and an expert cited by media outlets like Reuters, Marc loves infecting others with the joy of fundraising.



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**Table of Contents**

Introduction . . . . . 11

Chapter 1: Get R.E.A.L.: Research . . . . . 15

Chapter 2: Get R.E.A.L.: Engage . . . . . 25

Chapter 3: Get R.E.A.L.: Ask . . . . . 33

Chapter 4: Get R.E.A.L.: Love . . . . . 45

Chapter 5: Seven Fundraising Myths . . . . . 51

Chapter 6: Put Yourself in Their Shoes . . . . . 63

Chapter 7: Tools for Knowing Your Donors . . . . . 71

Chapter 8: Summary & Resources . . . . . 87



# 5 Five

## Seven Fundraising Myths

*A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.*

*- George Bernard Shaw*

*If I had to live my life again, I'd make the same mistakes, only sooner.*

*- Tallulah Bankhead*

*An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field.*

*- Niels Bohr*

*Mistakes are the portals of discovery.*

*- James Joyce*

*While one person hesitates because he feels inferior, the other is busy making mistakes and becoming superior.*

*- Henry C. Link*

*Mistakes are part of the dues one pays for a full life.*

*- Sophia Loren*

*To avoid situations in which you might make mistakes may be the biggest mistake of all.*

*- Peter McWilliams*



I am convinced that one of the best ways to learn what to do is by learning what not to do. Now that we've seen how to ask for money well, let's take a light-hearted look at seven of the most common mistakes I see fundraisers make. I should know—I've committed most of them!

Not only are these stories instructive, they're also a lot of fun. I hope the humor will make them easier to remember and harder to repeat.

### **Fundraising Myth #1: The Field of Dreams Fiasco**

During the board meeting of a client, we stumbled upon a perfect opportunity to make a planned giving ask of one of their constituents. The person had been actively involved with the organization for years. Her planned gift could endow an annual scholarship that was already being given in honor of her parents.

This opportunity was so good I was bursting with excitement! I enthusiastically explained how amazingly right a planned giving solicitation would be for this person. How such a gift might allow this prospect to do for the organization what she hadn't been able to do up until now. How the organization would benefit for decades to come from her generosity. And how her extended family may even get involved and give to the fund.

Then I stopped to let them discuss who would set up the visit. An uncomfortable silence filled the room. To my shock, not one of the people there wanted to make the ask. They fidgeted and shuffled their papers. After what seemed like an eternity, one person hesitatingly said, "I'm not sure we should ask her individually...What if we just sent a letter to our entire database asking them to consider a planned gift?"

One by one, everyone in the room began to breathe again. They all looked relieved, saying things like "Yeah, let's do that!" and "Great idea!" I was completely stunned; I actually called them a bunch of chickens.

They'd fallen for The Field of Dreams fiasco. In the movie Field of Dreams, the refrain is "if you build it, they will come." A nonprofit variation is: "if you send it, they will give." It seems that nonprofit boards really think people will make a large gift simply because they receive a mass produced letter.

What's the number one reason people don't give? They aren't asked. So sending a solicitation letter is better than not sending one. Most people won't open the envelope. The vast majority of those that do will look to see if their name is on it (instead of the awful "Dear Valued Person"!) and then the P.S. Very few will actually read the letter.

Here's a shocking truth: your organization is not the center of your donors' universe. They don't think about it nearly as much as you do. If the case for giving to the nonprofit were so self evident, people would already be giving more than your organization could handle.

One of the concepts I stress to my clients is P.Y.I.T.S.—Put Yourself In Their Shoes. If you were to get the planned giving letter they wanted to mail, would you be motivated to talk to an attorney to change your will?

It would probably take many letters over time from an organization you love to make you go through this discomfort. That's why in the direct mail world a 1% response rate is quite good. That means you get 1 gift for every 100 letters.

**Here's a tip:** If you're doing a campaign or asking a donor for a big gift, resist the urge to just send a mass one-size-fits-all letter or to say "if everyone gave just \$100 we'd raise the total amount." Decades of fundraising experience shows this doesn't work. Use the steps in this book, particularly the chapters on research and engagement, to successfully reach your goal. Isn't your organization worth it?

## **Fundraising Myth #2: The Mickey D's Syndrome**

When a dear friend of our family moved into senior hous-



ing, we had to get everything out of her house. But her new apartment was full long before the house was empty. With all the additional stuff on the lawn, it felt like we were starring on an episode of the TV show *Clean Sweep*.

In order to save time, I rented a dumpster. Rather than the cute little green one I envisioned, a huge construction-sized monster dumpster showed up in her yard. And it was a good thing, too! This woman was a bargain hunter and a pack rat. We threw out enough “seen on TV” gizmos and gadgets to fill up about half of the dumpster.

Only once did she get really upset—when I threw out a kitty litter bucket that actually contained an expensive compost starter. The thought struck me, if she hadn’t spent so much money on “good deals” that she never used, she would have been able to buy bucket loads of compost starter.

I call this “poverty thinking.” Nonprofits get stuck in this poverty thinking all the time. They become so focused on stretching their money that they lose site of quality. They will put in the cheapest cabinets in a multimillion-dollar building. Or they will bring their major donor to McDonald’s to show her how frugal they are.

Most donors, especially major donors, are wise enough to know that paying a little more up front will save significant amounts of money down the road. Cheap cabinets may have saved a few bucks this year. But, due to less frequent repairs and replacements, buying a higher quality, more expensive cabinet will actually save money over time.

The same idea applies when it comes to cultivating donors. Paying a little more up front can save lots of money over time. Taking a donor out to a nice restaurant is a way of showing her that we value her, that her relationship means more to us than just the money she is giving. She needs to know that we care about her and share her interests.

**Here’s a tip:** If a donor means enough to your organization to take her out to dinner, go to a place with real silverware. By all means, show her how well you stewarded the money she

gave, but don't be a cheapskate.

### **Fundraising Myth #3: The Cheez-It Treatment**

Have you tried to buy a box of Cheez-Its in the supermarket? I did not long ago and found the process incredibly intimidating. There are more than 10 different kinds of Cheez-Its! Some of the varieties to choose from include the following:

- Original
- Reduced Fat
- White Cheddar
- Big Cheez-Its
- Cheesy Sour Cream and Onion
- Parmesan and Garlic
- Cheddar Jack
- SpongeBob Cheez-Its
- Party Mix
- Chili Cheese
- Hot and Spicy

It took so long to look at the wall of orangish-red boxes that I almost forgot what kind I was looking for. The choice overwhelmed me enough that at first I first felt paralyzed. Then I felt stupid. How was it that I, a guy with a Master's degree, couldn't make a simple choice about a box of crackers?

Not liking to feel stupid, I left the aisle.

Oftentimes, we give our donors the Cheez-Its Treatment by overwhelming them with giving options. We think that the more options we give them, the better. Instead, we are giving them so many options that we're probably confusing them.

For example, does your web page or direct mail letter give donors the options something like this:

“You can give \_\_\$1000, \_\_ \$500, \_\_\$100, \_\_\$50, \_\_\$25, \_\_\$12.50, or \_\_any amount.”

Or does it also include a check box like this:

☐ “Please send me information on planned giving, stock transfers, creating an endowment, and corporate matching gifts.”

Our intentions are good. We know there are lots of ways to support our organization, and we don’t know when we’ll have the donor’s attention again so we want to give them as much information as possible.

But remember: P.Y.I.T.S., put yourself in their shoes. Are all these options helping motivate a donor to giving or are they paralyzing him? Options can be very helpful, but psychology experts have proven that too many options scare people away.

**Here’s a tip:** Try limiting giving options to three or four. Rather than sending a letter to all your donors listing giving options from \$10-\$10,000, why not segment donors and send slightly different reply cards with only three options: something close to what they gave last year, something bigger, and something even bigger than that. In the end, the donor may surprise you and give an amount much greater than you expected.

#### **Fundraising Myth #4: Mrs. McTat’s House of Cats**

FRFP #4 is all about watching what we say. In the children’s book Mrs. McTats and Her Houseful of Cats, kids are mesmerized by a great story about a kind lady that teaches the alphabet while sharing her adventure of living with 26 cats. Sharing a home with 26 cats may send shivers down your spine, but it’s possible that your donors may love cats. That’s why we must be careful when we speak.

Stephen Nill, founder and CEO of CharityChannel.com, wonderfully illustrates this point for us in one of his tales from the campaign trail.

I was meeting with an elderly lady, 89 years old, who had

around 20 cats in her home and around her property. She was contemplating a very large gift to an organization for which I was consulting as a planned giving officer.

The conversation was going very well. Then, she asked how to go about making a planned gift. For reasons that are now lost in the fog of time, I said, “There’s more than one way to skin a cat.”

You don’t want to know what happened next. It was ugly. Really, really ugly.

I couldn’t stop laughing when I read this. How many times have we wished we could take back something we have said? You can’t assume (yes, never assume) anything. Not everyone loves cats like Mrs. McTats—and not everyone loathes the animal either.

**Here’s a tip:** Script your key questions and answers before your visit. As I mentioned earlier in the book, phrases that may seem ordinary to you may not fit the situation. Be flexible and open to using different phrases. In fact, creating this kind of script actually increases your flexibility and frees you up to enjoy the other person more.

But isn’t it somewhat reassuring that none of us wins them all?

## **Fundraising Myth #5: The Spell-Check-Will-Catch-It**

It’s easy to rely only on spell check to catch your mistakes—until it doesn’t catch one and you’re wearing egg all over your face. Spell-check is not the same as proof-reading. Here are a couple of short stories development professionals shared with me regarding follies with spell check.

I used the word “erotic” when I meant “erratic.” Luckily it wasn’t in a situation where it could do any damage!

Probably the worst I can remember was in a mailing to major donors, when I learned the word public does not show up on spell check if you leave out the “l”.

We’ve all been there, haven’t we? We work on a letter. Read

it over. And over. And over. Edit it again and again. Finally we mail it. Then, when we get our own copy in the mail and see mistakes like those mentioned above!

**Here's a tip:** I've heard we're "spoiled" after we've read a letter we've written more than three times. After that, we need to get someone that hasn't even seen the letter to read it. If you've ever done this, isn't it embarrassing how many mistakes you've missed?

While computers are wonderful tools, they can't read your mind. Two sets of eyes are always better than one. You'll especially appreciate this when someone else catches something that you didn't see after staring at the page for hours.

### **Fundraising Myth #6: The You're-Good-Enough-To-Go-It-Alone Blunder**

On a recent fundraising campaign, I fell prey to one of the classic blunders: letting a solicitor fly solo. (For you Princess Bride fans, this classic blunder comes immediately after "Never go in against a Sicilian when death is on the line.")

This particular solicitor was wonderfully gifted and incredibly connected in the community. She had been an active volunteer and fundraiser for our organization for decades. As the development person, I was paired up with her for the campaign solicitations. But, given her long relationships with many of these people, it felt like I might be intruding if I went on a call with her.

So when I called her to see how the calls were going and let her know I was available to go with her anytime she would like, she declined my help. She knew all the people personally and thanked me for my offer. We hung up, both feeling good about ourselves, about the campaign, and about life in general.

Then I realized the problem: we were asking people for considerably more money than anyone had ever given our

organization. These asks were uncomfortable. And I let her fly into this unknown territory without me there by her side to support her. Worse yet, without accountability, it was far easier for her to chicken out.

A few days later, she dropped by my office and I was able to make amends. I apologized and said I felt like I had left her all by herself. I told her I was committed to helping her make the solicitations and would clear my schedule to be with her on her calls.

She was relieved. She still needed to make the calls for appointments because she had stronger relationships with our prospective donors. But I was back in as an aide and accountability person. I was also with her at the solicitations and made sure that the ask was specific and for the predetermined dollar amount. (The Get R.E.A.L. will teach you how to predetermine a dollar amount and then successfully ask for the amount during a solicitation.)

**Here's a tip:** Pair up for all your asks. Doing solicitations as a pair is much more effective than going it alone. It puts everyone in the room at ease, including yourself.

## **Fundraising Myth #7: The Highway Fallacy**

The highway fallacy comes from that ultimatum: “My way or the highway!”

In fundraising, this is when you're committed to going in there and getting that gift and entirely ignore all the clues and signals donor gives. This is a way to die a quick death when you're making an ask.

If you go to a solicitation, and the donor is clearly not interested, don't keep at it. Stop. Put down your presentation materials and let them know that you can see they're distracted. Offer to come back at a more opportune time.

Who knows? Perhaps their child is in labor with their first grandchild. Or maybe a family member took a turn for the worse the night before. What ever the case, your organization



is worthy of their complete attention. And they'll be grateful for your consideration.

We'll get into this in much more detail in the next two chapters "P.Y.I.T.S." and "Know Your Donors." For now, remember that not everyone is like you. Your organization isn't the most important thing in their world.

**Here's a tip:** Run your ideas past a coach, colleague, or trusted friend—particularly one that sees things from a different perspective than you.

Individually, none of these faux pas will ruin your fundraising. But commit all of them and you may be lucky if you get any money!

You can avoid making major mistakes by remembering the following:

- Don't be lulled into thinking everyone understands your cause
- Don't be cheap with your major donors
- Don't overwhelm people with too many options
- Don't forget to be careful with your phrasing
- Don't fail to have someone else look over your letters
- Don't go alone on major asks
- Don't ignore the clues the donor is sending you

# About the Author

**Marc Pitman** is a nationally-recognized thought leader and fundraising trainer. With over a decade of nonprofit experience and multiple campaigns, he's helped raise millions of dollars for all sorts of organizations: from schools to colleges, from hospitals to hospices, from community theaters to churches.



A noted expert quoted in media like Reuters and Successful

Fundraising, Marc is a sought-after speaker at conferences and seminars, including teaching his popular “Creating Donor Evangelists” program. Through his seminars and one-on-one work, Marc helps his clients reconnect with the passion that got them into fundraising in the first place. When he’s not helping others get passionate about raising money, he enjoys coffee, reading, and travel. Marc resides in Waterville, ME, with his incredible wife and three amazing kids.

For more great fundraising advice, go to Fundraisingcoach.com. There you’ll find:

- free articles and book reviews
- tools to help you raise more money
- links to Marc’s popular Extreme Fundraising Blog and free bi-weekly ezine
- and lots of helpful products in the Fundraising Coach Store.

## More Resources

Now that you can confidently ask for money, learn how to “create donor evangelists”! Creating Donor Evangelists is created to teach you how you can make your organization stand out from the herd...without spending a ton of money.

Marc walks you through the four essential ingredients for creating passionate donors. He then leads you through a detailed, step-by-step recipe book of ideas and techniques that you can put into practice immediately!

Among the things you'll learn in this information rich program are:

- 4 practical ways to build buzz,
- 7 ways to build to create community within your donor base
- how the original Napster can help your nonprofit, and
- what food courts around that country know that may revolutionize your fundraising efforts

People say they love that Creating Donor Evangelists is:

- high quality,
- incredibly affordable, and
- incredibly easy to get up to speed in a very short period of time.

Creating Donor Evangelists is available as a booklet, an audio program, and on-demand multimedia seminars. All formats are available at: <http://fundraisingcoach.com/cde.htm>

# Other Works by the Author

- The \$100,000 Guide to E-mail Solicitation
- The MagnetGoals Goal Setting Workbook
- Creating Donor Evangelists: Moving Donors from Mere Check Writers to Raving Fans