Fear and Faith in Fundraising

All of us experience fear in the work of fundraising, particularly major gift fundraising. Whether we are experienced or less experienced staff, whether we are experienced or less experienced volunteers, **we experience fear and can use faith as its antidote.**

FEAR

There are fears that arise as we think about going and making a solicitation. It might be about what we are going to do on the call or our abilities to execute and complete the call. We may be afraid of the attitude of those we are going to see how they will respond to us. It could be that we fear that we might be embarrassed in some way before these donors or before a volunteer or staff member whom we are bringing with us. We might fear the donor saying no to us, even saying no to us rudely.

One way to diminish the power of fear is to name the fear that you are experiencing. Reveal the fear for what it is. Disclose the fear to others. Tell your supervisor, a colleague or a trustworthy person that you have fears about the call. When you talk through the fear, you take the power away from the fear. Please don't think hiding or ignoring fear will help you, it won't.

There is power in preparation. Write out your call plan in advance. Think it through and memorize the key elements and steps. Think through the sequence of what you want to say, how you want to say it and when you want to say during the call. Consider what questions might arise from the donors and rehearse in advance. I have found it particularly helpful to review my call with others in advance. In my first years doing major gift work, I drove to donor visits, whether it was 15 minutes across town or two hours across southern Illinois. I would rehearse out loud on the way. For example, I would say, John and Mary, would you consider making a gift commitment of $50,000 to advance our program of education which you can pay outright or over a period of years?" I would memorize that question, repeating it out loud in my car. Then, when I was finally in front of the donor, whether the call was going well or there were distractions, once I got to the point when I could say, "John and Mary," out would flow the rest of the question.

FAITH

Rely on yourself less and rely on your organization more. Rely on the case that you represent, have faith in it, that is what you are representing. After all, it's not about you, it's about the donor. It's about the cause we represent and it's about the outcomes we hope gifts from this donor can produce. Put faith in these elements and worry less about yourself.

Have faith in the goodness of the prospective donor you are going to see. We engage with the greatest people on the planet. Donors are magnificent people, fascinating people. We are made better through our encounters and interactions with such donors. Have faith in their goodness. Have faith that they will receive you respectfully. They wouldn't have accepted the appointment if they weren't open to you and what you were coming to represent.

Have faith when your request is denied. This is an opportunity to ask why, to get to know the donor and their circumstances better. Use a no as an opportunity, not as something to be feared.

Finally, **have faith in the power that's yours,** yours as an ambassador of your organization, yours as a representative of a great mission with a impactful case. Reveal the power in the case, that's what you are there to accomplish. Share with them about the terrific outcome and impact that their gift can have. Then go from there.