# What About Those Who Are Not So Generous?

Those who raise money for non-profit organizations ordinarily engage with prospective donors who are inclined to can be generous. **But, what about those who are less generous?**

While working as Vice Chancellor for University Advancement at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Chancellor Tom George and I, at the recommendation and with a college dean of ours, went to see a prospective donor. He was a very successful, active, busy businessman who had built a large, rapidly-growing corporation. The dean was excited because he had built a friendly relationship with this individual. At the meeting, we shared our passion about a project for the dean's college. We presented giving levels particularly focusing on the gifts of significance. We highlighted leadership-level naming opportunities and we left considerable materials behind to reinforce the scope of the project. This gentleman said he would consider our request and agreed to see us soon. We went away hopeful and feeling positive about our visit.

A couple of months later, I returned with the dean and we asked this gentleman what he was thinking about the project. He blinked, then shook his head in befuddlement as **he had no recollection about what it was we were talking about.** He did not recall seeing any materials. As this was unfolding, I remember thinking, "What! Did he lose his mind? Is he feigning ignorance? What's going on here?!" Well, we stumbled our way through revisiting the project and we had some materials with us but not the exhaustive materials we had previously left behind. We left. Unsurprisingly, this did not result in a gift. Our dean was deeply disappointed. He had had high philanthropic expectations for this individual. I was disappointed, but less so, because our research did not surface any substantial giving from this person anywhere in the community in which he resided, and his company was based.

As fundraisers, we reach out to many people and organizations to ask them to support important causes. We are advised through referrals or through our research to go and engage them with our organization. Even though these individuals may have considerable resources, the inclination to be generous and possess some inclination towards our organizations are separate considerations for a prospective donor.

Why is this? There are countless reasons. Sometimes **it is a matter of timing for someone to open themselves to the practice of giving and become philanthropic.** It might be too early in their personal development for them to consider engaging in such affairs.

It could be because their focus is upon building a business and reinvesting substantial revenues back into the company. They may be living comfortably but they are re-directing sizeable resources into growing the business. Their long-term vision for wealth is tied to the prosperity of the company.

Others focus upon creating family wealth for themselves and for their children and grandchildren as they strive to create a family legacy.

**For others it may be a matter of their family life cycle**: children in high school, children in college, children getting married, grandchildren being born. They may have parents needing care with extraordinary expenses, or other family members with complexities that require significant resources. Oftentimes we have little to no knowledge of their circumstances.

It could be they simply have not been exposed to the compelling nature of the mission of our organizations, so they appear to be lukewarm or less interested.

**Our role is to introduce people to philanthropy and that takes hard work.** We must invest the time to build relationships and educate prospective donors with information and stories that illustrate the impact and joy they would derive as donors to our organizations.

A potential donor of significance may require a substantial investment from us of our time and energy. Through investing ourselves in building a meaningful relationship with them, over time we may come to advise, guide, and help them to become philanthropic. This is especially rewarding for fundraisers. Our task is to develop donors; to assist people on their journey of philanthropy. Yes, without question we will experience disappointments, but the gratification we enjoy, with those we assist to make gifts of greater significance, more than outweighs our disappointments. We should not be discouraged.