



## Outside of the Ask: “Why Do I Hear from You Only When You Want Money?”



Ouch! “I only hear from you when you want money” is the most difficult feedback to receive from donors! We know donors aren’t ATMs; they are real people who care about our mission. However, based on an objective appraisal of a fundraiser’s communication plan, one can see how donors may feel like the relationship is a bit one-sided.

For donors, “no news” is not “good news.” Rather, “communication equals appreciation.”

Sincere, regular communication—without an ask at the end—may be the easiest and most cost-effective way to appreciate donors and build loyalty. Here are ideas for you to consider as you review your communication plan:

### Regular newsletters

Review your past editions. Do they include a soft ask? They most often do. In the donor’s mind, that simple, innocent addition changes the format from a relational communication to a transactional solicitation. Periodically, focus only on sharing success stories without asking for a gift.

### Handwritten notes

Consider sending your most loyal and long-standing donors, as well as all your large-gift donors, a handwritten note. It can be a very simple message, including an article featuring the organization, a photo of clients or something of special interest to the donor. Few fundraisers do this, and it will set your organization apart from others, because you took the time to connect with them as individuals and not just as donors.

### Personal phone calls

Personal phone calls are another easy and inexpensive way to set you apart from other nonprofits vying for donors’ attention. For example, one nonprofit was in urgent need of a roof repair and a few donors had given generously to meet the need. Shortly after, on a rainy afternoon, the executive director called each one of the donors to thank them again, personally. “I wanted to let you know what we are not doing today, thanks to you! Without your help, the staff and I would have been running around with buckets, catching rain water this afternoon. Instead, we are busy serving people in need.” Those donors will never forget the personal phone call.

The average donor supports four or more organizations in a big way. To ensure your organization stays near the top of the list, consider how you can communicate with donors outside of the ask.

*Janell Johnson, Senior Vice President (Wilmington, N.C.)*

