By Professor Russell James III

The Socratic Fundraiser

Using Questions to Advance the Donor's Story

IV

The Socratic Fundraiser:
Using Questions to Advance the Donor's Story

The Fundraising Myth & Science Series: Book IV

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The Fundraising Myth & Science Series

Book I: **The Storytelling Fundraiser**: The Brain, Behavioral Economics, and Fundraising Story

Book II: **The Epic Fundraiser**: Myth, Psychology, and the Universal Hero Story

Book III: **The Primal Fundraiser**: Game Theory and the Natural Origins of Effective Fundraising

Book IV: **The Socratic Fundraiser**: Using Questions to Advance the Donor's Story

PROFESSOR RUSSELL JAMES

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INTRODUCTION: THE RETURN OF THE HERO

If you're starting with this as your first book in the series, Welcome! This is the most immediately practical of all the books. It's the "answer key" that gives the bottom line of "how to do it." If you've got a donor meeting tomorrow, you're in the right place.

If you've made it through the previous books in the series, Welcome back! You've been on quite a journey.

The Storytelling Fundraiser started in a relatively ordinary world. Sure, some of the evidence might have been new. But the conclusions were probably familiar. Stories work better than statistics. Character works better than calculations. But then things got weird.

The Epic Fundraiser crossed a threshold. It entered a magical new world of monomyth and archetype. Maybe you felt some resistance to leaving behind the ordinary fundraising world. But you went forward. You continued the journey.

And then things got even weirder. *The Primal Fundraiser* looked at natural origins. It explored the hero archetype's ethological mirror. It was quite a challenge. But you made it through!

And now, at the end, you return … to the beginning. This final section returns to the ordinary world of fundraising. It's the most practical one. You've got a job to do. What exactly, should you say? How should you say it? The final section looks at these answers. But the previous parts of the journey inform these practical suggestions.

That original world of practical fundraising is now different for you. The journey has changed your understanding. You know that the goal isn't just to advance *any* story. The goal is to advance the *donor's hero story*. You understand why some messages will resonate and others won't. You've been transformed. You've won a victory.

But don't stay in that magical world of myth, theory, and academia. (Unless you want to pursue your Ph.D. with me!) Now it's time to return. It's time to take your victory and make it a "boon" for your community. It's time to finish the hero story!

-Professor Russell James

1

Socratic Fundraising Theory: How Questions Advance the Donor's Story

> "It's very important not to know all the answers. Often we don't know, and if we did it would be no good, for it is of greater value to the patient when he discovers the answers himself."
>
> -Carl S. Jung[1]

This is the most practical book in the series. And still, we start with theory. This isn't just a penalty for reading something written by a professor. In the end, it's quite practical. Yes, we'll get to lists of tips and tricks. We'll look at magic phrases and powerful questions. But first, it helps to know what we're doing. It helps to know *who* we're *being*. Once we get that, everything else fits. It fits the story. It fits the model. It fits the theory.

[1] Bennet, E. A. (1982). *Meetings with Jung*. Anchor Press. p. 32.

Delivering value

What does a charity offer that the donor wants? A charity can provide value to many people in many ways. But *fundraising* provides value *to the donor* in just one way – by delivering an enhanced identity.

This can be private. It can affirm a donor's desired moral identity *internally*. The audience for the gift can be simply the donor himself. The gift can enhance personal meaning.

This can also be public. The gift can project a desired moral or economic identity *externally*. The audience for the gift can include valued members of the donor's community. The gift can enhance reputation.

Fundraisers can provide value. They do so as "merchants of meaning" or "retailers of reputation."

Back to the "one big thing"

The "one big thing" in fundraising is this: *Advance the donor's hero story*. Enhanced identity is part of this story. It is the ultimate result.

The hero's journey[2] begins in the hero's original world. This defines his[3] *original identity*. He is then *challenged* to leave behind that ordinary, small, self-focused world. He is *challenged* to make an impact on the larger world. He initially refuses, but then accepts the challenge. The journey ultimately results in a decisive *victory*. The hero returns, bringing improvement to his original world. His *identity* has changed. He has become a transformed (internal) and honored (external) victorious hero.

The steps in the hero's journey (monomyth) can be simplified to

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[2] Joseph Campbell uses a three step circular illustration with this description,

> "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."

Campbell, J. (1949/2004). *The hero with a thousand faces* (commemorative ed.). Princeton University Press. p. 28.
I label these steps as follows:
The beginning point of "the world of common day" is "**original identity**."
"Venturing forth into a region of supernatural wonder" is "**challenge**."
"Fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won" is "**victory**."
"The hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" is "**enhanced identity**."
I apply this both to a scenario where the charitable gift serves only as the final step in the heroic life story and where the gift request itself constitutes the challenge that promises a victory delivering enhanced identity. In a conventional narrative arc, the steps of original identity, challenge, victory, and enhanced identity also serve as backstory, inciting incident, climax, and resolution, respectively.

[3] As a convention for clarity and variety, throughout this series the donor/hero is referred to with "he/him/his" and the fundraiser/sage is referred to with "she/her/hers." Of course, any role can be played by any gender.

Original Identity → Challenge → Victory → Enhanced Identity

Or as a cycle

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← Victory

A compelling story requires each step. Each part must connect to the others. A *challenge* isn't compelling if it doesn't promise a *victory*. A *victory* isn't meaningful unless it delivers *enhanced identity*. An *enhanced identity* requires connecting with *original identity*.[4] And so on for every step in the cycle. Each step must connect to the others.

The perfect ask

What do new fundraisers really want to know? It's often something like this.

> "How do I ask for money in just the right way?"
>
> "What's the magic phrase that will make donors give?"

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[4] For elaborations of this concept, *see e.g.,* Elenbaas, J. D. (2016). *Excavating the mythic mind: Origins, collapse, and reconstruction of personal myth on the journey toward individuation.* [Ph.D. Dissertation]. Pacifica Graduate Institute; Gerhold, C. (2011). *The hero's journey through adolescence: A Jungian archetypal analysis of "Harry Potter".* [Ph.D. Dissertation]. The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.

Focusing on the perfect ask is natural. In the monomyth cycle, the ask is the *challenge*.

A compelling *challenge* forces a decision. But it's a *challenge* that links to the donor's *identity*.

- The *challenge* responds to a threat or opportunity. But it's a threat or opportunity for the donor's people or values.

- The *challenge* promises a *victory*. But it's a *victory* for the donor's people or values.

The *challenge* isn't compelling by itself. It's compelling only as part of the full story cycle.

- The *challenge* looks backward. It connects with the donor's *original identity*. It connects with the donor's history, people, or values.

- The *challenge* also looks forward. It promises a meaningful *victory* in the future.

The promised *victory* is meaningful only as part of the full story cycle.

- The *victory* looks backward. It benefits the donor's source of *original identity*. It helps the donor's people or values.

- The *victory* also looks forward. It delivers an *enhanced identity* to the donor. The donor returns as a victorious and transformed hero.

The perfect ask cannot exist in isolation. The *challenge* is only a single step. To be compelling, it must be part of the full story cycle. It must advance the donor's hero story.

Appreciative inquiry

Advancing this story can start by asking and listening. This can uncover the donor's

- *Original identity* (related to the charity, cause, or project), and
- *Meaningful victory* (related to the charity, cause, or project).

Only then can the fundraiser find or create a relevant

- *Challenge* (related to the charity, cause, or project).

Questions can do a lot. Of course, they can uncover information. But they can do more. Empathetic listening signals a social or friendship relationship,[5] rather than a purely transactional one. This encourages sharing.[6]

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[5] In one experiment with speed daters, "one more question on each date meant that participants persuaded one additional person (over the course of 20 dates) to go out with them again." Quoted in Brooks, A. W., & John, L. K. (2018). The surprising power of questions. *Harvard Business Review, 96*(3), 60-67. Citing to Huang, K., Yeomans, M., Brooks, A. W., Minson, J., & Gino, F. (2017). It doesn't hurt to ask: Question-asking increases liking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 113*(3), 430-452.

[6] *See* Book I in this series, *The Storytelling Fundraiser: The Brain, Behavioral Economics, and Fundraising Story,* Chapter 10: Using family words not formal words in fundraising story. *See also* Book III in this series, *The Primal Fundraiser: The Natural Origins of Effective Fundraising*, Chapter 4:

Questions can also teach. Even more, questions allow people to teach themselves. Questions can change "*an* idea" into "*my* idea."

Socratic fundraising

In the donor-hero's journey, the effective fundraiser plays an essential role. The fundraiser is the guiding sage who challenges with a choice. In film, we see this character in Obi-Wan Kenobi, Minerva McGonagall, Morpheus, or Gandalf the Grey.

But the best example of the guiding sage isn't from film or fiction. The best example is from history. When questions go beyond simply eliciting facts, we enter the world of Socrates.

Socrates taught by asking questions. The purpose of his questions was not for *him* to learn something. It was for *the student* to learn something.

Law school

The Socratic method of teaching is familiar to law students. The law professor isn't asking questions because *she* wants to learn something. She is asking questions because she wants *the student* to learn something.

Relationship is the foundation of primal fundraising: I'm with them because we're partners!

Isn't it easier just to tell the student the right answer? Yes. It is easier.

But if the student uncovers the answer through his own reasoning, things change. The answer isn't just the teacher's opinion. It's the student's opinion. He discovers it. He believes it. He understands why he believes it.

As Blaise Pascal wrote in 1660,

> "People are generally better persuaded by the reasons which they have themselves discovered than by those which have come into the minds of others."[7]

The wisdom of experience

This isn't just a matter of ancient history, philosophy, or fiction. It's a practical tool for transformational philanthropy.[8] As Rod Zeeb puts it,

> "We ask the questions because what they say is fact; what you say is opinion. If you tell them something, it is just an opinion, even if it is totally accurate. But, if they tell you the same thing, it is a fact. We have to ask them questions so they can tell us the facts."[9]

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[7] Pascal, B. (1660; 1910). *Pensées* (trans: Trotter, W. F.). Collier & Sons. p. I.10.
[8] Rod Zeeb at The Heritage Institute defines "transformational philanthropy" as "a gift that means as much to the donor as it does to the organization." Zeeb, R. (2016). *Rod Zeeb talks about transformational philanthropy.* [Video]. https://theheritageinstitute.com/speaker
[9] Zeeb, R. (2011). Multi-generational planning. (pp. 347-353). *Annual meeting proceedings of the million-dollar round table.* p. 352. http://www.imdrt.org/mentoring/2011_Zeeb.pdf

Socratic fundraising isn't new. Successful fundraisers already know this secret. It's a common theme in fundraising advice. In a summary of dozens of fundraising advice books, Dr. Beth Breeze concludes,

> "... best practice among successful fundraisers reflects the axiom that: 'The idea to give must come from the donor. The facilitation of the idea is the responsibility of the [fundraiser]'."[10]

In describing her most memorable multimillion-dollar gift, fundraiser Pamela Davidson explains,

> "That is my goal always, to have a gift conversation – which is a far less stressful goal for both a prospect and the professional than a gift ... I asked the couple many open-ended and logical questions ..."[11]

One study of 1,200 university major gift officers described the special traits of the most successful. It called them "Curious Chameleons."[12]

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[10] Breeze, B. (2017). *The new fundraisers*. Policy Press. p. 149. Quoting from Matheny, R. E. (1995). Communication in cultivation and solicitation of major gift donors. In *New directions in philanthropic fundraising*, 10 (pp. 33-44). p. 43.

[11] Davidson, P. (2019). Pamela Davidson. In E. Thompson, J. Hays, & C. Slamar (Eds.), *Message from the masters: Our best donor stories that made a difference* (pp. 49-63). Createspace Independent Publishing. p. 55.

[12] O'Neil, M. (2014, September 24). 'Curious chameleons' make the best major-gift officers, new study says. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy.* https://www.philanthropy.com/article/Curious-Chameleons-Make/152575 Education Advancement Board. (2014). *Inside the mind of a curious chameleon*. https://eab.com/insights/infographic/advancement/inside-the-mind-of-a-curious-chameleon/

They were inquisitive and flexible. They asked prospects "thoughtful, insight-generating questions about their goals and interests."[13]

In studies, stories, theory, and experience, the answer is the same. Appreciative inquiry works. Questions work.

A rose by any other name: Universal fundraising

At its core, the cycle is universal.

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← Victory

But these labels aren't necessary for it to work. The same concepts arise in many approaches.

One describes fundraising steps as

1. Do you care? *[i.e., Identity connections]*
2. How do you want the world to be different? *[i.e., Defining a victory]*
3. Here's your chance. *[i.e., Making the challenge]*

Another includes,[14]

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[13] *Id.*

[14] Birkholz, J. M., (2018, September 17). *Identifying major gift donors.* [Presentation]. Practical Planned Giving Conference, Orlando, Fl.

1. Identify and confirm their interests: "So, it sounds like you care about ...?" *[i.e., Identity connections]*
2. What is your goal in your giving? *[i.e., Defining a victory]*
3. Can I come back with a proposal? *[i.e., Making the challenge]*

The language or sequence may vary, but the elements are there. Successful paths are similar. Questions are a big part of the process. This is true beyond just fundraising.

A rose by any other name: Universal sales

Major gifts fundraising is different from typical sales. But it does have more in common with major transaction sales. Such major contracts are often preceded by years of relationship building.

The classic text on such sales is the 1980s book *SPIN Selling*.[15] It's based on 12 years of research and 35,000 sales calls. A summary explains,

> "To win larger, consultative deals ... salespeople must abandon traditional sales techniques. Rather than twisting their customers' arms, they need to build value, identify needs, and ultimately, serve as a trusted advisor."[16]

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[15] Rackham, N., Kalomeer, R., & Rapkin, D. (1988). *SPIN selling*. McGraw-Hill.
[16] Frost, A. (2018). *SPIN selling: The ultimate guide.* [Website]. https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/spin-selling-the-ultimate-guide

Sound familiar? It should. And not just in its conclusion.

SPIN (S-P-I-N) selling is an acronym of four steps.

1. Learn the customer's ***S****ituation*.
2. Get the customer to identify a ***P****roblem*.
3. Get the customer to elaborate the ***I****mplications* of the problem.
4. Present a product or service that promises a solution. This "***N****eed payoff*" addresses needs defined by the customer in the previous steps.

Now compare. Advancing the donor's hero story with Socratic fundraising means

1. Learn the donor's backstory and ***original identity*** related to the charity, cause, or project. (This is the donor's *Situation*.)
2. Get the donor to define a meaningful ***victory***. (A victory overcomes a *Problem* – a threat or opportunity.)
3. Get the donor to elaborate on the ***identity*** connections that make the ***victory*** meaningful. (These are *Implications*.)
4. Present a ***challenge*** that promises a meaningful ***victory***. A meaningful victory "pays off" in an ***enhanced identity***. (This "*Need payoff*" enhances identity as defined by the customer in the previous steps.)

The steps match. Advancing the donor's hero story with Socratic fundraising *is* SPIN selling. It's SPIN selling of an enhanced identity. It's SPIN selling of private meaning or public reputation.

What's the point? Triangulation. Different people using different methods in different times and places all point to the same answer. When this happens, pay attention to that answer.

Next steps

In the donor's hero story, the fundraiser is the hero's guiding sage. For the guiding sage, questions are important. They're not just a way to discover information. They're a way to influence the hero's journey and destination.[17] Jung writes,

> "Often the old man in fairytales asks questions like who? why? whence? and whither? for the purpose of inducing self-reflection and mobilizing the moral forces ..."[18]

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[17] "These cause the who? where? how? why? to emerge clearly and in this wise bring knowledge of the immediate situation as well as of the goal. The resultant enlightenment and untying of the fatal tangle often has something positively magical about it ..." Jung, C. G. (2015). *Aspects of the masculine* (3rd ed.). Routledge. p. 405.

[18] Read, H., Fordham, M. & Adler, G. (Eds.). (1953-1978). *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (20 vols). Routledge, 1953-78. Vol. 9, Part 1, paragraph 404. Note that the "guiding sage" archetypal monomyth character referenced in this series is, in Jung's work, called the wise old man. In the same paragraph he explains, "The old man always appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation from which only profound reflection or a lucky idea, in other words, a spiritual function or an endopsychic automatism of some kind can extricate him. But since, for internal and external reasons, the hero cannot accomplish this himself, the knowledge needed to compensate the deficiency

For the fundraiser, the real goal is not to tell a story. It's to guide the donor to tell his own story. It's to guide the donor to tell his own *donor-hero* story.

Now what? How can we actually do this? What specific questions do we ask? The next chapter looks at this.

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comes in the form of a personified thought, i.e., in the shape of this sagacious and helpful old man."

2

Socratic Fundraising Overview: A Step-By-Step Menu of Questions

Socratic fundraising

Socratic inquiry uses questions. But just asking questions isn't enough. To be Socratic, the questions must guide toward a goal.

In fundraising, the "one big thing" is always the same: Advance the donor's hero story. Socratic fundraising can do this.

The hero story steps

In the universal hero story (monomyth), a guiding sage often kicks off the hero's journey. The sage challenges the hero with a choice. It's a challenge to

- Go beyond his small, self-focused original world,
- Pursue the hope of victory impacting the larger world, and

- Become a transformed (internal) and honored (external) victor who brings a boon back to his original world.

In the *donor's* hero story, the *fundraiser* is the guiding sage. This guiding sage challenges with a choice. This happens at the ask. A compelling fundraising *challenge*

- Connects to the donor's *original identity* (history, people, or values),
- Promises the hope of a *victory* impacting the larger world, and
- Delivers *enhanced identity*: internal (private meaning) or external (public reputation).

The hero story cycle

The hero story progresses through

Original Identity → **Challenge** → **Victory** → **Enhanced Identity**

In three words, this is: *identity, challenge,* and *victory*.

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← **Victory**

In fundraising, including each step makes the ask compelling. Completing the cycle advances the donor's hero story. Let's look at the ideas underlying each step.

Original Identity → Challenge

In other words, "I am the kind of person who makes gifts like this." Why?

- Because of my people,
  i.e., "People like me make gifts like this."
- Because of my values,
  i.e., "Giving to this cause or charity fits my values."
- Because of my history,
  i.e., "Giving to this cause or charity fits my life story."

Victory → Enhanced Identity

In other words, "I want to be (or be seen as) the kind of person who makes an impact like this." Why?

- Because of my people,
  i.e., "This impact helps (or is supported by) people like me (or with me)."
- Because of my values,
  i.e., "My values make this impact meaningful to me."
- Because of my history,
  i.e., "My life story makes this impact meaningful to me."

Challenge → Victory

In other words, "The gift will make this tangible (visualizable) impact."

The tightening spiral

In Socratic fundraising, the donor tells his story. But the goal is to get the donor to tell his story about these steps: *identity, challenge,* and *victory*. The steps in this story cycle aren't just a one-time process. They're an ongoing, repeated, circular narrative.[1]

Socratic fundraising progresses from general to specific. The circle becomes a spiral. It moves from broad to narrow. The process can start with wide-open, sweeping cycles.

This might first elicit the donor's identity elements. This includes

- People: The donor's family and affiliations
- Values: The donor's beliefs and principles, and
- History: The donor's key life story elements.

[1] In his book describing the universal hero story (monomyth), Joseph Campbell writes, "Many tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle (test motif, flight motif, abduction of the bride), others string a number of independent cycles into a single series (as in the Odyssey). Differing characters or episodes can become fused, or a single element can reduplicate itself and reappear under many changes." Campbell, J. (2004/1949). *The hero with a thousand faces* (commemorative ed.). Princeton University Press. p. 228.

Questions can connect these *identity* elements to giving (i.e., the *challenge*) and to impact (i.e., the *victory*). This completes the circle. It connects *identity*, *challenge*, and *victory*.

Then the circle becomes smaller.

It connects these *identity* elements with a specific cause or charity.

Then the circle becomes smaller.

It connects these *identity* elements with a specific project or work within the charity.

Then the circle becomes smaller.

Just before the ask, the proposal reviews and confirms each step in the cycle.

Finally, the smallest circle is the challenge phrase itself.

The ask itself references each step in the cycle.

The process is like a tightening spiral or mandala. The three-step cycle is our guide: *identity, challenge,* and *victory*. If our questions are building these three connections, they're advancing the story. Otherwise, we're just making conversation.

Step-by-step

The compelling challenge requires these three links. Socratic fundraising can help. It can build these links through the following steps.

1. Justify asking questions.
2. Ask questions that
   - Connect with the donor's identity (*Original Identity → Challenge*), and
   - Define a personally meaningful victory (*Victory → Enhanced Identity*).
3. Ask questions that make the challenge.

The first step is to justify asking questions. For example,

- I'm interested in your story.
- I need your help or advice.
- I can help or advise you.

The next step is to ask questions that connect with the donor's identity and define a personally meaningful victory. This includes

1. Ask opening questions.
2. Ask follow-up questions.
3. Ask confirmation questions after reflective statements.
4. Spot solutions while repeating these steps.

The final step is to ask questions that make the *Challenge*. This includes

1. Ask for permission to ask.
2. Connect the gift with the full story cycle.

Restate and confirm the identity connections. (*Original Identity → Challenge; Victory → Enhanced Identity*). Make the case for support. (*Challenge → Victory*).

3. Ask for the gift.

These theory concepts show up in real-world practice. They match the questions that the best fundraisers often ask. Next are about two hundred examples quoted from top fundraisers. Use them verbatim or create your own. But the key is to understand the cycle.

There isn't just one "magic" question. Different questions work for different people at different times. Questions become powerful when they're part of the full story cycle. They're not just random conversation. They move towards a destination. They advance a story. They advance the donor's hero story.

Part I: Identity

The following are examples of opening questions and phrases. These connect the donor's original identity (history, people, or values) with the charity, the cause, or philanthropy.

Identity: Life history

Cause or charity origin story

"When did you first get interested in [this cause]?"[2] "Would you mind telling me how you became connected to the organization?"[3] "How did you first find out about us?"[4] "What first brought your attention to our organization?"[5] "How did you first get involved with the organization?"[6] "How did you get connected to this organization?"[7] "Can you tell me what brought you to [this charity] in the first place?"[8] "How did you get [or come to be] involved with our organization?"[9] "How did you decide to first start

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[2] Levine, J. & Selik, L. A. (2016). *Compelling conversations for fundraisers: Talk your way to success with donors and funders.* Chimayo Press. p. 15.
[3] Sheffield, C. (2020, October). *Discovery: How to learn about a donor's assets*. [Presentation]. Emerging Philanthropy Conference, Western PA Chapter Association of Fundraising Professionals and the Pittsburgh Planned Giving Council. Pittsburgh, PA [online]. *See also,* Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity…* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 6. ("How did you get connected with ABC Charity?")
[4] Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 14.
[5] Swank, K. (2009, October). *What women want: Understanding the needs and objectives of women's philanthropic giving, including planned gifts*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 9.
[6] Kihlstedt, A. (2009). *Capital campaigns: Strategies that work*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers. p. 61; *See also,* Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book*. Nashville, TN: CharityChannel Press. p. 89.
[7] Kihlstedt, A. (2013). *Asking styles: Harness your personal fundraising power.* CharityChannel Press. p. 22.
[8] Levine, J. & Selik, L. A. (2016). *Compelling conversations for fundraisers: Talk your way to success with donors and funders.* Chimayo Press. p. 40.
[9] Wilson, T. C. (2008). *Winning gifts: Make your donors feel like winners.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 115 ("get involved"); Klein, K. (2009). *Reliable fundraising in unreliable times: What good causes need to know to survive and thrive.* Jossey-Bass, p. 32 ("come to be involved")

supporting ABC Charity?"[10] "What first made you interested in supporting this hospital?"[11] "What got you started as a donor to this organization?"[12] "What led you to make your first gift to the organization?"[13]

Philanthropy origin story

"Where did you learn to give?"[14] "How did you learn to be generous?"[15] "What is your first memory of when you knew it was important to give back and help those people or organizations in need?"[16] "What is your first memory of an act of generosity?"[17]

School or camp origin story

"What are your best memories of your time at ABC Charity?"[18] "What experiences were most

[10] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 6.
[11] Janey, S. (2012, October). *Start with their dreams: Let major and planned giving techniques follow.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, New Orleans, LA. p. 6.
[12] Kihlstedt, A. (2013). *Asking styles: Harness your personal fundraising power.* CharityChannel Press. p. 22.
[13] Fridman, N. (2021, May 26). *Why now is the perfect time to have a conversation about values, giving and your family's legacy* [PowerPoint slides]. Life and Legacy Annual Gathering, online. p. 18.
[14] Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. p. 148.
[15] *Id.*
[16] Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 6.
[17] Begun, M. S., & Rosandich, S. (2009, October). *Retreats, circles, squares & blogs: donor collaborations that work.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 3.
[18] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 5.

meaningful to you during your time as a student?"[19] "What were your favorite moments as a student."[20] "What's your favorite place on campus?"[21] "What was the best thing about your experience at our school?"[22] "Did you participate in any activities while a student?"[23] "Tell me about your favorite faculty member."[24]

Post-origin story journey

"Tell me about your journey since you graduated from the university."[25] "Tell me about your journey since you were first diagnosed." "Tell me about your journey since you first became involved in [this cause]."

Cause or charity life history review

"How has [this cause or charity] been important in your life?"[26] "Tell me your ABC Charity

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[19] Wood, K. (2020, May 7). Personal communication. Kris Wood, Senior Director of Development, College of Arts & Sciences, Texas Tech University.
[20] Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book.* CharityChannel Press. p. 90.
[21] Fendrich-Turner, K. (2020, September 9). Personal communication. Katy Fendrich-Turner, Director of Gift Planning, University of Texas - Austin.
[22] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference, Las Vegas, NV. p. 5.
[23] Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book.* CharityChannel Press. p. 90.
[24] *Id.*
[25] Vidmar, T. (2020, May 1). Personal communication. Tony Vidmar, VP University Advancement and Public Affairs, Midwestern State University.
[26] *See* James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 27*(2), 998-1011. (Showing the impact of adding the phrase "to support causes that have been important in your life" on interest in making a legacy gift)

story."[27] "How has [this cause or charity] impacted your life?"[28] "How has the organization's work affected you personally?"[29] "What have been your past experiences with the organization?"[30] "If you were to tell others about your care at the hospital, how would you describe it?"[31] "What have been your most positive experiences at our charity?"[32] "What is the most meaningful experience you had through your involvement?"[33]

Identity: People

Cause or charity people connections

"Have others in your life been affected by [this cause]?" "Is there anyone in your family who also cared about [this cause]?" "How has [this charity] impacted your family or loved ones?"[34] "Have any of your family members or close friends been involved

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[27] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 6.
[28] *Id.*
[29] Kihlstedt, A. (2009). *Capital campaigns: Strategies that work.* Jones & Bartlett Publishers. p. 61.
[30] Swank, K. (2009, October). *What women want: Understanding the needs and objectives of women's philanthropic giving, including planned gifts.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 9.
[31] Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book*. CharityChannel Press. p. 90.
[32] *Id.* at p. 89.
[33] Fridman, N. (2021, May 26). *Why now is the perfect time to have a conversation about values, giving and your family's legacy* [PowerPoint slides]. Life and Legacy Annual Gathering, online. p. 18.
[34] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity…* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 6. (Modified from original "How has ABC Charity impacted your life? Your family or loved ones?")

with our charity?"[35] "Is your giving your decision or do you decide together with someone else? What is their connection to [this charity or cause]?"[36] "Do you have a favorite doctor or staff person at the hospital?"[37] "Do you know any of our leaders, board/committee members, staff, volunteers, or other supporters?"[38]

Philanthropy people connections

"Did your parents or other family members support any charitable causes?" "Can you tell me a bit more about who taught you to be generous or where your generous spirit comes from?"[39] "When you were young, was there anyone whom you considered a role model for giving?"[40] "Who are your philanthropic role models?"[41]

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[35] Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book*. CharityChannel Press. p. 89.
[36] *See* similar concept in Fredricks, L. (2001). *Developing major gifts: Turning small donors into big contributors.* Aspen Publishers, Inc. p. 58.
[37] Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book.* CharityChannel Press. p. 90.
[38] Fredricks, L. (2001). *Developing major gifts: Turning small donors into big contributors.* Aspen Publishers, Inc. p. 59.
[39] Green, F., Wagg, H. & Field, C. (2019). *You can't take it with you: The art and science of legacy fundraising*. Independently published. p. 106.
[40] Steenhuysen, J. (2012, October). *Philanthropy planning: What to say and do in the room with your donors/clients to explore and document their philanthropy mission*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 7.
[41] Eskin, J. (2019). *10 Simple Fundraising Lessons: A common sense guide to overcoming your fear of asking for gifts*. Eskin Fundraising Training, LLC. p. 39.

Identity: Values

Values underlying giving motivations

"What inspires you to give?"[42] "What inspired you to make this gift?"[43] "What inspired your first gift?"[44] "Broadly speaking, what is your rationale for charitable giving?"[45] "What inspired you to create your donor advised fund / private family foundation?"[46] "How does your giving reflect your values, your feelings, and your aspirations?"[47]

Values underlying causes supported

"Tell me about a few other causes you support: why do you support them?"[48] "Would you mind telling me about the causes that are most important to you?"[49] "Do you typically give to the same nonprofits

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[42] Modified from Cadogan, E. & Skinner, K. (2016, October). *Transformational blended gifts: Shifting the organizational culture.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Dallas, TX, p. 9. ("What motivates/inspires you to make a charitable gift?")
[43] Brovey, A. (2019). *Zen and the art of fundraising: The pillars in practice.* CharityChannel Press. p. 10.
[44] Muir, R. (2016, March 18). 21 discovery questions to ask now. [Blog]. https://www.rachelmuir.com/blog/2016/03/18/21-discovery-questions-to-ask-now
[45] Steenhuysen, J. (2012, October). *Philanthropy planning: What to say and do in the room with your donors/clients to explore and document their philanthropy mission*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 9.
[46] Sharkey, G. (2021, March 25). Personal communication. Greg Sharkey, Senior Philanthropy Advisor, The Nature Conservancy.
[47] Ahern, T., & Joyaux, S. P. (2011). *Keep your donors: The guide to better communications & stronger relationships.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 147.
[48] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference. Las Vegas, NV. p. 5.
[49] Muir, R. (2015, November 17). 21 discovery questions to ask now. [Blog]. https://trust.guidestar.org/blog/2015/11/17/21-discovery-questions-to-ask-now/

each year?"[50] "Why do you support them?"[51] "Where else do you give, and why?"[52] "Where does [this charity] fit in your overall philanthropic priorities?"[53] "Where does our charity fall on your list of charitable priorities?"[54]

Values attributed to others

"What do you think are the most important factors to donors who make a major gift to our institution?"[55] "What is the single most important reason that you believe someone would support the project?"[56] "How can we make giving to this charity more compelling for other donors?"

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[50] Sheffield, C. R. (2019, August 14). Discovery: How to learn about a donor's assets. [Webinar slides]. https://www.stelter.com/Documents/pdf/webinars/Stelter%20Discovery%20August-2pp.pdf

[51] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference. Las Vegas, NV. p. 4.

[52] Ahern, T., & Joyaux, S. P. (2011). *Keep your donors: The guide to better communications & stronger relationships.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 262.

[53] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 6.

[54] B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book.* CharityChannel Press. p. 90.

[55] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference. Las Vegas, NV. p. 5.

[56] Kihlstedt, A. (2009). *Capital campaigns: Strategies that work*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers. p. 62.

Identity: Open-ended (history, people, or values)

Connections

"Do you mind if I ask, what is your connection to our mission [or organization]?"[57] "How could we connect with you better?"[58] "How would you like to be more involved?"[59] "Is there any area within the organization where you could see yourself becoming more involved?"[60]

Why us?

"Why do you give to this organization?"[61] "Why do you support us?"[62] "What's motivated you to be such a consistent supporter [of this charity]?"[63] "Why

[57] Swank, K. (2009, October). *What women want: Understanding the needs and objectives of women's philanthropic giving, including planned gifts*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 9.
[58] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planners Conference. Las Vegas, NV. p. 5.
[59] Kihlstedt, A. (2013). *Asking styles: Harness your personal fundraising power*. CharityChannel Press. p. 22.
[60] Swank, K. (2009, October). *What women want: Understanding the needs and objectives of women's philanthropic giving, including planned gifts*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 9.
[61] Ahern, T., & Joyaux, S. P. (2011). *Keep your donors: The guide to better communications & stronger relationships.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 261.
[62] Fredricks, L. (2001). *Developing major gifts: Turning small donors into big contributors*. Aspen Publishers, Inc. p. 59. (Note the emphasis here, "Remember, if you only have time to ask your prospect one question, make sure it's 'why do you support us?'")
[63] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 6.

have you been such a loyal donor?”[64] “Why have you been so loyal?”[65] “Why does what we do interest you?”[66] “Why do you serve on X committee?”[67] “Why does this cause matter to you?”[68] “What’s the key thing that persuaded you to join our cause?”[69] “Why do you care so much that you would sacrifice your precious time and invest your limited dollars to move this mission forward?”[70] “When you think about programs such as ours, what motivates you to support them?”[71] “I understand you haven’t supported our cause significantly in the past; tell me more about that.”[72] “Of all the charities you could support, why do you support us?”[73]

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[64] Fridman, N. (2021, May 26). *Why now is the perfect time to have a conversation about values, giving and your family’s legacy* [PowerPoint slides]. Life and Legacy Annual Gathering, online. p. 18.
[65] Tumolo, J. (2016, August 24). *The approach.* [Blog]. Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/approach-joseph-tumolo-cap-/
[66] Ahern, T., & Joyaux, S. P. (2011). *Keep your donors: The guide to better communications & stronger relationships.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 76.
[67] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planners Conference. Las Vegas, NV. p. 5.
[68] Ahern, T., & Joyaux, S. P. (2011). *Keep your donors: The guide to better communications & stronger relationships.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 261.
[69] Ross, B. & Segal, C. (2009). *The influential fundraiser: Using the psychology of persuasion to achieve outstanding results*. Jossey-Bass. p. 239.
[70] Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. p.58.
[71] Bristol, E. & Lysakowski, L. (2013). *The leaky bucket: What’s wrong with your fundraising and how you can fix it.* CharityChannel Press. p. 191.
[72] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference. Las Vegas, NV, p. 4.
[73] Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 11. (Also phrased as “Out of all the organizations you could support, what motivates you to give now or to continue to give?” at p. 227.)

Sidenote: A caution about "Why?"

In the previous questions, we often want to learn "why?" But using this word is risky. "Why?" or "Why did you do that?" can feel like an attack.[74] It's what we say when a person has done something stupid. It can cause defensiveness. So, be careful with this word. Where possible, consider a substitute.

Part II: Victory

The following are examples of opening questions and phrases to define a meaningful victory.

Victory: Defining the broadest victory

Global victory

"What changes do you believe would make the world a better place?"[75] "If you could change the world, what would you do?"[76] "How would you like to make a difference in this community? In this world?"[77]

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[74] Wise, W. & Littlefield, C. (2017). *Ask powerful questions: Create conversations that matter.* [Audiobook. Radin, D. Narrator, publisher: Podcraft] at 3:41:19 ("I'm asking you to cross off the 'why' because 'why' may lead to feelings of being attacked or defensiveness.")
[75] Ahern, T., & Joyaux, S. P. (2011). *Keep your donors: The guide to better communications & stronger relationships.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 262.
[76] *Id. at* 147
[77] *Id. at 262*.

Legacy victory

"What would you like to pass on to future generations?"[78] "As you look out to the future, what is the legacy you would like to leave?"[79] "What positive difference do you want to make?"[80]

Victory: Defining a giving victory

No limits victory

"If there were no restrictions on you, what would you like to do philanthropically?"[81] "In the best of all possible worlds, what would you do to support our charity?"[82] "If you could do anything for [this charity], if the sky was the limit, what would that look like to you?"[83] "If money were no object, what would you like to see happen with our program?"[84] "If money were no object, what would we be doing that we're not now doing?"[85] "If money were no object,

[78] *Id.*
[79] Levine, J. & Selik, L. A. (2016). *Compelling conversations for fundraisers: Talk your way to success with donors and funders*. Chimayo Press. p. 76.
[80] Gragg, A. (2019, December 1). *20 questions to ignite meaningful conversations*. [Website]. https://www.decideyourlegacy.com/20-questions-to-ignite-meaningful-conversations/
[81] Lydenberg, J. (2007, October 13). *Identifying planned gift donors.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Grapevine, TX. p. 4.
[82] *Id.*
[83] O'Neil, K. (2020, May 6). Personal communication. Kim O'Neil Associate Vice President, Institutional Advancement, Texas Tech University.
[84] Tumolo, J. (2016). *Simplify: A simple approach to building a sustainable planned giving program.* Independently published. p. 77.
[85] Davidson, P. J. (2012). *A planned giving plan of action: A three-year plan.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 1.

what kind of an impact would you like your giving to have?" "What would be your dream gift?"[86]

Overall victory

"What change do you want to see because of your giving?"[87] "What do you want to achieve with your charitable donations?"[88] "What do you hope to achieve with your philanthropy?"[89] "What would you ultimately like to accomplish with your philanthropy at our charity?"[90] "What are your goals for your Donor Advised Fund / Private Family Foundation? How long do you want it to last?"[91] "What are you trying to accomplish with your philanthropy and how might we help?"[92] "As you think about making a difference with your philanthropy, what appeals to you most?"[93] "What kind of impact would you like to have on [this cause / these beneficiaries]?"[94] "Do you have any

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[86] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference. Las Vegas, NV, p. 4.
[87] Fridman, N. (2021, May 26). *Why now is the perfect time to have a conversation about values, giving and your family's legacy* [PowerPoint slides]. Life and Legacy Annual Gathering, online. p. 17.
[88] Bristol, E. & Lysakowski, L. (2013). *The leaky bucket: What's wrong with your fundraising and how you can fix it.* CharityChannel Press. p. 186.
[89] Lewzey, E. (2019). *4 powerful questions to ask your donors*. [Website]. https://www.blueskyphilanthropy.com/single-post/2019/05/15/4-powerful-questions-to-ask-your-donors
[90] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference. Las Vegas, NV, p. 4.
[91] Sharkey, G. (2021, March 25). Personal communication. Greg Sharkey, Senior Philanthropy Advisor, The Nature Conservancy.
[92] Schiller, R. (2017, October). *What are donors telling us?* [Powerpoint slides]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 34.
[93] Muir, R. (2016, August). *The art of discovery and making the ask*. [Powerpoint slides]. Presented at Fundraising Day Wisconsin.
[94] *E.g.,* Fendrich-Turner, K. (2020, September 9). Personal communication from Katy Fendrich-Turner, Director of Gift Planning, UT-Austin. ("What kind

lifetime charitable goals? Tell me about those."[95] "What would you like to accomplish with your money / giving / philanthropy in this cause or at this charity that would be meaningful to you?"[96]

Single gift victory

"What are your goals for this gift?"[97] "What kind of impact do you want to make with your gift?"[98] "[If the donor has a current scholarship, endowment, etc., ask] what kind of impact do you ultimately want it to have?"[99] "Have you thought about how you would like your planned bequest gift to be used?"[100] "A year

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of impact would you like to have on UT Austin students? Can you tell me more about that?").

[95] Steenhuysen, J. (2012, October). *Philanthropy planning: What to say and do in the room with your donors/clients to explore and document their philanthropy mission*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 9.

[96] *See,* Chapter 5 "Socratic fundraising foreshadowing: Questions that uncover a meaningful victory"; *See also*, Begun, M. S., & Rosandich, S. (2009, October). *Retreats, circles, squares & blogs: donor collaborations that work.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 2. ("What do you want to accomplish with your philanthropy?"); Advancement Resources. (2017, November 15). *The power of the pause: Using silence in donor conversations*. [Web page] https://advancementresources.org/the-power-of-the-pause-using-silence-in-donor-conversations/ ; Shaw-Hardy, S., Taylor, M. A., & Beaudoin-Schwartz, B. (2010). *Women and philanthropy: Boldly shaping a better world*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 115. Quoting from Advancement Resources. (2006). *The art and science of donor development workbook*. Advancement Resources, LLC. ("What would you want to do with your money that is meaningful to you?")

[97] Rice, N. (2020, May 4). Personal communication from Nathan Rice, Senior Director of Gift Planning for Institutional Advancement, Texas Tech University.

[98] Wilkes, C. (2020, May 2). Personal communication from Cliff Wilkes, Major Gift Officer, School of Medicine, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center.

[99] *Id.*

[100] Lumpkin, S. & Comfort, J. (2018, August 23). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. Colorado Planned Giving Roundtable, 30th Annual Summer Symposium, Denver, CO. This suggestion originated from Jeff Comfort, Vice President, Principal Gifts and Gift Planning, Oregon State University. He labels this, "She came in through the bathroom window," referencing the Beatles song

from now, how would you know that you made a wise move with your philanthropic investment in us?"[101] "If you were going to make a significant investment in the hospital, a gift in the million-dollar range, what would you like to accomplish with that gift?"[102]

Victory: Defining an organizational victory

Organizational change victory

"If you could change anything to better [this charity], what would it be?"[103] "You've been such a loyal member of the ABC Charity family, and have supported ABC Charity's mission for so many years, what are your dreams for where you'd like to see ABC Charity go in the future?"[104] "What are your long-term hopes for our charity and its mission?"[105] "If you had the ability to enhance or expand ABC Charity's mission in a specific way, what would it be? What could we do to be more effective in the future?"[106]

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because it is an *indirect* approach that eventually leads to the ultimate issue of revealing the amount of the planned gift.

[101] Eskin, J. (2019). *10 Simple Fundraising Lessons: A common sense guide to overcoming your fear of asking for gifts*. Eskin Fundraising Training, LLC. p. 39.

[102] Janney, S. (2013, October). *The meaning of money.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning. Minneapolis, MN. p. 2.

[103] De Luca, C. C. (2020, May 4). Personal communication. Carolina Camargo De Luca, Discovery Officer, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso.

[104] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 6. (Notice how this phrase includes both the Original Identity → Challenge link ("You've been… and supported…") and the Victory → Enhanced Identity link ("What are your dreams…")

[105] Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book*. CharityChannel Press. p. 90.

[106] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 6.

"Where do you think we could improve our services or programs?"[107] "Are there any thoughts you'd like me to take back to share with our CEO/ president/ executive director?"[108] "What are the most critical results you expect our organization to produce?"[109] "What could we do better in your opinion?"[110] "If you could change anything about [this organization, issue or project], what would it be?"[111] "If there was one thing you could change about our charity today, what would it be?"[112]

Organizational interest victory

"What areas of [this charity] are you most interested in?"[113] "What interests you personally about the problem we are addressing?"[114] "What excites you the most about our organization's work in the world?"[115] "What means the most to you personally

[107] Swank, K. (2009, October). *What women want: Understanding the needs and objectives of women's philanthropic giving, including planned gifts.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 9.
[108] *Id.*
[109] Ahern, T., & Joyaux, S. P. (2011). *Keep your donors: The guide to better communications & stronger relationships*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 261.
[110] *Id. at* p. 11.
[111] McLeod, L. (2013). *Selling with noble purpose: How to drive revenue and do work that makes you proud.* Wiley. p. 120.
[112] Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book.* CharityChannel Press. p. 9.
[113] Modified from Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 14. ("what are you most interested in about our organization?")
[114] Perry, G. (2007). *Fired-up fundraising: Turning board passion into action*. John Wiley & Sons., p. 122.
[115] *Id.* at p. 42; *See also* Levine, J. & Selik, L. A. (2016). *Compelling conversations for fundraisers: Talk your way to success with donors and funders.* Chimayo Press. p. 46. ("Of the things you … know about us, what most excites you?"); Eisenstein, A. (2014). *Major gift fundraising for small shops: How to leverage your annual fund in only five hours per week*.

about what ABC Charity does?"[116] "What were your impressions of the tour? ... What intrigued you most?"[117] "Is there a particular program, project, or area of outreach [scholarship fund, award, etc.] that interests you most?"[118]

"If you were to make a significant commitment, is there a particular area you would want your gift to support?"[119] "Based on what you have told me about your experiences, memories, wishes, etc., if I can help you find a way, *what* at our nonprofit would you most like to support financially?"[120]

Organizational strengths victory

"What do you think we do best?"[121] "What do you think is the best thing about what our non-profit does?"[122] "What contributions to the community does

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CharityChannel Press. p. 65. ("What's the one thing about our work that excites you most?")

[116] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 6.

[117] Perry, G. (2007). *Fired-up fundraising: Turning board passion into action*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 135.

[118] Fredricks, L. (2001). *Developing major gifts: turning small donors into big contributors*. Aspen Publishers, Inc. p. 59.

[119] Levine, J. & Selik, L. A. (2016). *Compelling conversations for fundraisers: Talk your way to success with donors and funders.* Chimayo Press. p. 79.

[120] Smith, C. (2017). *Extend your reach: How major gift officers become active partners in gift planning efforts*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 19.

[121] Swank, K. (2009, October). *What women want: Understanding the needs and objectives of women's philanthropic giving, including planned gifts.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 9.

[122] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference. Las Vegas, NV. p. 5.

the organization make that are important to you?"[123] "What's the most exciting thing you've heard about our institution recently?"[124]

Victory: Defining a victory with gift options

Victory with a single gift option

"What do you think about this opportunity?" "What is most compelling to you about the project?"[125] "Could you ever see yourself being involved in a project like this?"[126] [After an event describing a project ask] "What were your impressions of the event?"[127]

Victory with a menu of gift options

"Which of these projects would be most meaningful or important to you?" "If you had to choose between making a gift toward the new building, the scholarship fund, or our endowment, which would you select? Why?"[128] "If you could have your family's name on something like a building, scholarship, lectureship, what would be most

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[123] Kihlstedt, A. (2009). *Capital campaigns: Strategies that work*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers. p. 61.
[124] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques*. Charitable Gift Planning Conference. Las Vegas, NV, p. 5.
[125] Kihlstedt, A. (2009). *Capital campaigns: Strategies that work*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers. p. 62.
[126] Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. p. 174.
[127] Perry, G. (2007). *Fired-up fundraising: Turning board passion into action*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 125.
[128] Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. p. 158.

meaningful to you?"[129] "After outlining the various projects to be funded by a campaign, ask, 'If you had the money to fully fund any one aspect of the project, what would it be?'"[130]

Victory: Defining a victory with gift implications

Personal implications

"What if [this goal was accomplished]? What would that mean to you?" "What would it mean for you to make a personal impact in saving, or extending, the lives of women living with breast cancer?"[131] "What would it mean for you and your family to have an enduring impact in improving cancer therapies while assuring your own family's financial future?"[132] "What are your thoughts about naming facilities or programs after benefactors? … But what about you? How would you feel about associating your name with this project?"[133] "Does your philanthropy give you joy?"[134] "What philanthropic gift has given you the greatest joy?

[129] Modified from De Luca, C. C. (2020, May 4). Personal communication. Carolina Camargo De Luca, Discovery Officer, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso.
[130] Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. p. 157.
[131] Pittman-Schulz, K. (2012, October). *In the door and then what?* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 14.
[132] *Id*. at p. 15.
[133] Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. pp. 189-190.
[134] Rothey, R. (2017, October). *Bankers and lawyers and CPAs--Oh my! Collaborating with advisers.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning. Baltimore, MD. p. 6.

How?"[135] "What makes giving a rewarding experience?"[136]

Community implications

"Why do you think this project is important to the community?"[137] "What would the world look like in ten years, if the women who died of breast cancer last year, hadn't? How would families and communities be different because of the accomplishments those women would have made?"[138]

Victory: Defining a victory that would overcome a barrier

"What would have to happen for you to say yes [to a gift request, invitation to serve, etc.]?"[139] "So [, yes,] I do understand why you stopped supporting us. What can we do to bring you back into the fold?"[140] "What would motivate you or your business to invest in a nonprofit organization?"[141]

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[135] Muir, R. (2016, August). *The art of discovery and making the ask*. [Powerpoint slides]. Presented at Fundraising Day Wisconsin.
[136] Eskin, J. (2019). *10 Simple Fundraising Lessons: A common sense guide to overcoming your fear of asking for gifts*. Eskin Fundraising Training, LLC. p. 39.
[137] Kihlstedt, A. (2009). *Capital campaigns: Strategies that work*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers. p. 61.
[138] Pittman-Schulz, K. (2012, October). *In the door and then what?* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 14.
[139] Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. p. 104.
[140] Levine, J. & Selik, L. A. (2016). *Compelling conversations for fundraisers: Talk your way to success with donors and funders.* Chimayo Press. p. 53.
[141] Bristol, E. & Lysakowski, L. (2013). *The leaky bucket: What's wrong with your fundraising and how you can fix it.* CharityChannel Press. p. 198.

Victory: Defining a victory with past giving

"Tell me about some meaningful gifts that you have made."[142] "How do you know when you have made a 'good gift?' Share a couple of examples of 'good gifts' with me. Why did you feel they were good?"[143] "I understand you made a significant gift to X at our institution a while back; How do you feel about how we used your funds?"[144] "When you look at all of your giving, be it time or money, what captures your heart and your attention?"[145]

Part III: After the opening

Follow-up questions

Opening questions start the conversation. But the conversation needs to continue. Follow-up questions can help. These can be open-ended. For example,

> "Would you tell me more about that?" "How do you mean?" "How so?" "How did you feel about that?" "How did you feel when that happened?" "What happened next?" "Really! Tell me

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[142] Steenhuysen, J. (2012, October). *Philanthropy planning: What to say and do in the room with your donors/clients to explore and document their philanthropy mission*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 8.
[143] *Id.*
[144] Melvin, A. (2018, October). *The ties that bind: Effective cultivation techniques.* [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference. Las Vegas, NV. p. 5.
[145] Perry, R. & Schreifels, J. (2014). *It's not just about the money: How to build authentic major donor relationships.* Veritus Group. p. 135.

> more." "What else?" "Can you give me an example of that?" "What led you to that?"[146]

Even better is when the questions are reflective. This shows you've been listening. Reflective follow-up questions include,

> "Tell me more about …." "What happened after you …?" "What's an example of …?" "How does … fit into the picture?"

Reflective summary and confirmation question

The donor has been talking. Hopefully, we've been listening. We've been listening for links that connect to a challenge. We've been listening for identity connections. We've been listening for victory connections. In the next step, we summarize and confirm the donor's connections.

The goal isn't just to show we've been listening. It's to highlight these connections for the donor. This happens in three steps.[147]

1. *Reflective transition*

   "So, what you are saying is …" "It feels like you are …" "It sounds to me like …" "So, you are thinking about …" "So, what I'm hearing is …" "I'm picking up that …" "I'm noticing that …"

[146] See examples in Wise, W. & Littlefield, C. (2017). *Ask powerful questions: Create conversations that matter.* CreateSpace.
[147] *Id.*

“So, your experience has been …” “I’m getting the sense that …” “I think what I heard is that …” “Would I be correct in saying that …” “So, you’re saying that …”

2. *Reflective statement*

   Summarize, highlight, or repeat key statements that support a connection.

3. *Confirmation question*

   “Do I have it right?” “Is that it? Is that right?” “Is that what happened?” “Does that sound right?” “Am I getting it right?” “Is that the right idea?”

Spot solutions

We’ve been listening. We’ve been identifying connections. We’ve been confirming those connections. Now we match these with donor experiences or gift options.

Consider possible experiences. What experiences would strengthen these connections? Are there particular programs, areas, or projects that match? What employees, beneficiaries, or other donors should they meet?

Consider possible gift options. What peers should be present at the solicitation? Are there giving instruments that match? These might be

- Scholarships
- Endowments
- Virtual endowments
- Charitable trusts
- Memorial gifts
- Estate gifts, or
- Other complex instruments.

Ask for the next step

Typically, initial conversations don't end with a donation request. But they do end with a request. This might simply be a request to share the next experience. For example,

> "Can we set a time so I could show you one of our facilities?"[148] "Do you think you have time for a tour sometime in the next two weeks?"[149] "Would you be interested in attending [this event]?" "I think you would be a fantastic addition to our [board, committee, or group]. What are your thoughts on that?"

Part IV: Challenge

The final step moves towards and then makes a compelling ask. The following are examples of questions and phrases that do this.

[148] Levine, J. & Selik, L. A. (2016). *Compelling conversations for fundraisers: Talk your way to success with donors and funders.* Chimayo Press. p. 25.
[149] *Id.* at p. 7.

Ask for permission to ask

At some point, things progress to a fundraising ask. But the ask shouldn't be a surprise. (At least not for any significant request.) This isn't an ambush. Instead, we want permission. We want permission to present an ask.

The ask, however, is described in terms that highlight *value*. We don't just want to ask for money. We want to share helpful options. Example phrases include,

> "Would you be open to exploring ideas to …"[150] "Would you be interested to hear more about how you could …"[151] "Would you like to hear about some possible ways to …"[152] "We would like to show you some ways that you can … Would you be open to hearing some of these ideas?"[153] "My job is to put together personalized options for you to consider. Would you mind if we set a time to look over some of those ideas together?"

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[150] Buderus, A. A. & Smith, G. P. (2013, October). *Blended gift, eh? Making the most of this emerging workhorse for major and planned gift officers.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Minneapolis, MN, p. 9.
[151] *Id.*
[152] Brovey, A. P. & Roenigk, P. L. (2008, October 25). *How old are you and did you know you could…. Initiating planned gift discussions and getting answers to key questions.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Denver, CO, p. 12.
[153] Buderus, A. A. & Smith, G. P. (2013, October). *Blended gift, eh? Making the most of this emerging workhorse for major and planned gift officers.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Minneapolis, MN, p. 9.

The options we want to share are valuable. They might address problems or barriers for the donor. Example phrases include,

> "What if it was possible to make a gift and still [address financial objection]? Would you like to hear about these options?"[154] "If we could show you a way to … would that be of interest?"[155] "There are simple ways to … Would you like to know more about those?"[156] "Can I tell you about a gift option that would …"[157]

The options we want to share are useful. Other people like the donor agree. Example phrases include,

> "Others in your situation have … Would you like to hear more about how this works?" "You remind me of another donor. Do you mind if I share her story? She was able to … Is that something that might be useful for you?" "Some of the people I meet with are interested in hearing about ways to … Is that something

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[154] Brovey, A. P. & Roenigk, P. L. (2008, October 25). *How old are you and did you know you could…. Initiating planned gift discussions and getting answers to key questions.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Denver, CO. p. 9.
[155] Buderus, A. A. & Smith, G. P. (2013, October). *Blended gift, eh? Making the most of this emerging workhorse for major and planned gift officers.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Minneapolis, MN, p. 9.
[156] Comfort, J. & Lumpkin, S. (2017, October). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity…* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 7.
[157] Brovey, A. P. & Roenigk, P. L. (2008, October 25). *How old are you and did you know you could…. Initiating planned gift discussions and getting answers to key questions.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Denver, CO. p. 11.

> that might interest you?" "Others who share your feelings have established perpetual funds here as a way of giving back to 'dear old State.' Would you like to hear more about setting up such a fund, perhaps in honor or memory of a beloved family member?"[158]

Once we get a yes, we just need a date. Example phrases include,

> "Would your calendar allow us to meet this Thursday or next Tuesday?"[159] "How does next Tuesday work for you to meet?"[160]

The ask meeting

Fundraising needs an ask. But the fundraising ask shouldn't be just a "naked" challenge. It should be part of the full story cycle.

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← Victory

The challenge comes from the donor's identity. It leads to a meaningful victory. The victory is meaningful because it connects with the donor's identity.

[158] *Id.* at p. 7.
[159] Pitman, M. A. (2008). *Ask without fear! A simple guide to connecting donors with what matters to them most.* Tremendous Life Books. p. 38.
[160] Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 103.

This ask or proposal meeting presents this full cycle. It will describe and confirm the donor's identity connections:

- *Identity → Challenge*
- *Victory → Identity*

The "case for support" then shows

- *Challenge → Victory*

This step may use a formal proposal document. It will answer,

Why is the project needed?
[It will define a victory.]

Why now?
[It will show the challenge comes from a threat or opportunity that forces a choice.]

How exactly will it work?
[It will show how Challenge → Victory.]

What's it going to cost?[161]
[It will define the challenge.]

Make the story cycle ask

Finally, the ask itself can present the story cycle one last time.

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[161] Kihlstedt, A. (2009). *Capital campaigns: Strategies that work*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers. p. 60. (referencing these four questions to answer in the case for support).

Challenge
[1]↗ ↘[3]
Identity ← Victory
[2]

[1] *Identity* → *Challenge* sentence
"You have … [here describe a connection with the donor's identity]."

[2] *Victory* → *Identity* sentence
"You understand … [here describe how the victory would be meaningful to the donor]."

[3] *Challenge* → *Victory* sentence
"Would you consider a gift of $______ to … [here describe the promised victory]?"[162]

Then, be silent. An ask might sound like this:

- [1] "You have been a friend of this library for over twenty years." *Identity* → *Challenge*.

  [2] "You understand how a new regional history collection would preserve our shared heritage." *Victory* → *Identity*.

  [3] "Would you consider a gift of $50,000 to lead the campaign to make this a reality?" *Challenge* → *Victory*.

[162] Three sentences adapted from Collins, M. E. (2017, Winter). The Ask. *Advancing Philanthropy*, 16-23, p. 21. Quoting Marcy Heim. *See also,* Heim, M. (2018, August 22). *Wanna Do EVERYTHING Better?* [Website] http://marcyheim.com/wanna-do-everything-better

- [1] "You have done so much to improve care for others since your own diagnosis with breast cancer." *Identity → Challenge.*

  [2] "You understand more than anyone how lives can be changed by offering free early screening." *Victory → Identity.*

  [3] "Would you consider a gift of $100,000 to help fund next year's screening clinics?" *Challenge → Victory.*

- [1] "You have always had such a heart for supporting the arts in our community." *Identity → Challenge.*

  [2] "You understand how this new exhibition could make a real impact for other art lovers like you and our whole city." *Victory → Identity.*

  [3] "Would you consider a gift of $50,000 as our lead campaign donor to make this happen?" *Challenge → Victory.*

- [1] "You have been such a loyal alumnus of this department since you graduated years ago." *Identity → Challenge.*

  [2] "You understand how important scholarships are in helping others like you become proud alums of the future." *Victory → Identity.*

[3] "Would you consider a gift of $100,000 to fund a permanent named scholarship giving students the chance for an education?" *Challenge → Victory*.

Conclusion

There may not be one magic question. Use whatever works for you. But there is a magic journey. It connects,

- Original *identity* to a *challenge,*
- The *challenge* to a *victory,* and
- The *victory* to an enhanced *identity*

The magic journey is the hero's journey. It's also the donor's journey. Questions can help advance that donor-hero's journey.

3

Socratic Fundraising Permission: Can I Ask You A Question?

The missing piece in the story

A novel can have a perfect story. But it will still fail without one thing. The reader must turn the page. It's easy to miss this small act of permission. But without it, the story stops.

Traditional "interruption marketing" overlooks this step. Instead, the view is,

> "We've got a great story. All we need is to get it out there!"

In this approach, advancing a story is measured in "impressions," "ad buys," or "reach." That can work. But even more powerful is "permission marketing."[1]

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[1] Godin, S. (1999). *Permission marketing: Turning strangers into friends and friends into customers*. Simon and Schuster.

Permission in Socratic fundraising

Suppose we're at a social event. We start talking about our great charity. How long can we do that? Pretty much forever. We can just keep talking and talking.

What if instead, we ask a question? How long can we do that? That's up to the other person. After we ask a question, we stop talking. The next step is theirs.

Socratic fundraising requires permission. The donor must participate. He must agree to answer our questions. This is true in all types of long-term relationship sales. The classic text on these sales, *SPIN Selling*, explains,

> "there are many ways to open a call, but the common factor of most good openings is that they lead the customer to agree that *you* should ask questions … you want to establish your role as the seeker of information and the buyer's role as the giver." [2]

Permission before Socratic fundraising

Often, we need permission even before this. Asking questions works great if we're already having conversations with donors. (Events, meetings, and tours can be great openings to talk.) But what if we aren't have those meetings? In that case, we've got to get permission for a meeting.

[2] Rackham, N., Kalomeer, R., & Rapkin, D. (1988). *SPIN selling*. McGraw-Hill.

This isn't a proposal meeting. We aren't asking for a gift. (And make sure the donor knows that!) This is a discovery meeting. We want to ask questions.

We want donors to say "yes" to a meeting. We want them to say "yes" to answering our questions. How do we get there?

Monomyth motives

The one big thing in fundraising is always the same: Advance the donor's hero story. In the donor's hero story, the fundraiser is the guiding sage. She helps the donor complete the hero's journey.

- She connects the donor's original identity with the cause, organization, or project. *[Original Identity → Challenge]*
- She presents a challenge that promises a victory. *[Challenge → Victory]*
- The victory results in an enhanced identity. This is external (reputation) or internal (meaning). *[Victory → Enhanced Identity]*

The motives can be different for each of the three steps. The first uses a *social* motive. The donor's life story, people, and values link to the cause. *[Original Identity → Challenge]*.

The second uses an *impact* motive. The challenge promises a victory. *[Challenge → Victory]*.

The third uses an *honor* motive. The victory brings the hero external and internal honor. *[Victory → Enhanced Identity].*

At each step, the fundraiser helps the donor. She helps the donor complete the journey. She provides value as a guiding sage. This uses a *value* motive.

How can we justify asking questions? How can we get the meeting? Using these same motives can work. For example,

1. I'm interested in your story.
    - This uncovers original identity. It uses a *social* motive.

2. I need your help or advice.
    - This reflects a prestige identity. It uses an *honor* motive.
    - This also promises a victory. It uses an *impact* motive.

3. I can help or advise you.
    - The fundraiser acts as the helpful guiding sage. This uses a *value* motive.

Let's look at each of these approaches in detail.

Approach 1: I'm interested in your story

"So, tell me about yourself!" This is natural for a social setting. I share a bit about my story. I ask about their story. This approach says, "I'm interested in you. Tell me more." This "appreciative inquiry" makes conversations fun. It's what friends do.

But this can also focus on fundraising topics. It can ask how their story connects with the charity or cause.[3] But it doesn't have to start there. General questions about a person's life can help, too.[4] Such

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[3] See Chapter 4 "Socratic fundraising backstory: Questions that connect with the donor's identity"

[4] This can start with easy questions about family, pets, hobbies, or entertainment. It might be simple like,

> So, what do you do when you're not eating lunch at this restaurant (or whatever activity you're both doing at the time)?
> Can you tell me more about your work/your career?

It might involve deeper questions such as

> Who has had a deep impact on you personally or professionally?
> Is there a question you wish people would ask you?
> What are some of your hopes for our world right now?
> When you're not working, what do you spend time doing?
> What's the most important thing to you?
> What has been your life's passion?
> What mistake or failure in your life taught you the most?
> If you could pick one – would you have more time or money? What would you do with it if you got it?
> What makes you happy despite anything else happening around you?
> What do you love about what you do?
> What keeps you up at night?

It might involve questions that subtly point to connections with the charity

> "Have you lived here a long time?" can be preceded by "Many of our donors come from this area," or "I really like working for this charity because I grew up in this area. Over the years, I've seen what a tremendous difference it has made for [cause] in the area." *See* Fredricks, L. (2001). *Developing major gifts: turning small donors into big contributors.* Aspen Publishers, Inc. p. 60.

Examples above from,
Lydenberg, J. (2007, October 13). *Identifying planned gift donors.* [Paper presentation]. The National Conference on Planned Giving, Grapevine, Texas.

rapport-building questions can help show interest. They can help build relationship. This opens the door for later fundraising questions.

This can also be a reason to meet. It might be general. For example,

- "I'm in your area and want to get better acquainted."[5]

Or it can be fundraising specific. For example,

- "Every donor has a story to tell about how they got connected with [this organization]. I want to hear yours."[6]
- "I'd love to sit down with you to learn more about you and how helping our furry friends became a priority for you."[7]
- "Our ___ anniversary is coming up. We're putting together a collection of stories from donors about how [this charity] has been important in their lives. We've found these stories often inspire others to support the

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Muir, R. (2018, January 30). *3 secrets of great fundraisers.* [Blog]. https://www.rachelmuir.com/blog
Sheffield, C. (2020, October 6). *Discovery: How to learn about a donor's assets.* [Powerpoint slides]. Emerging Philanthropy Conference, Western Pennsylvania Chapter Association of Fundraising Professionals and the Pittsburgh Planned Giving Council. Pittsburgh, PA [online]
Pitman, M. A. (2008). *Ask without fear! A simple guide to connecting donors with what matters to them most.* Tremendous Life Books. p 29.

[5] Muir, R. (2017, April 10). Secrets to think like a donor & boost revenue. [Powerpoint slides]. https://www.rachelmuir.com/

[6] *Id.*

[7] Muir, R. (2018). *Get the visit, nail the ask! 10 ways to get the visit*. [Blog]. https://www.rachelmuir.com/ask

cause. I'd love meet with you and hear about your experiences."

In each case, the motive is social. (That's why it's a visit, not an appointment!)[8] The purpose is, "I'm interested in your story!"

Barriers to appreciative inquiry

This approach isn't just a trick. To work, our interest must be real. There's a reason why successful fundraisers are called "*curious* chameleons."[9] For questions to work, they must reflect real curiosity. The must express genuine interest.

That means a question isn't simply,

- A launching point for a sales pitch
- A way to force agreement, or
- An excuse to immediately ask for money.

The "sales pitch" problem

We've all had conversations like this. The other person asks a question. But he isn't really

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[8] Panas, J. (2020). *Asking: A 59-minute guide to everything board members, volunteers, and staff must know to secure the gift.* Emerson & Church. pp. 24-25. ("I don't call this an appointment…. An appointment has a negative connotation. If you need to have a root canal, you call your dentist for an appointment…. But a visit, that's quite different, quite pleasant.")

[9] O'Neil, M. (2014, September 24). 'Curious chameleons' make the best major-gift officers, new study says. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy,* https://www.philanthropy.com/article/Curious-Chameleons-Make/152575 Education Advancement Board. (2014) *Inside the mind of a curious chameleon.* https://eab.com/insights/infographic/advancement/inside-the-mind-of-a-curious-chameleon/

interested in the answer. He just wants to talk about … what he wants to talk about. The question is just a pretext. It's an excuse.

That's bad. What's worse is when the question is a launching point for a long sales pitch. It's like the cliché Amway sales guy. He might ask a question. But he's not actually being social. He doesn't care about your answer. He just wants an excuse to launch into a block of "interruption marketing."

The "forced agreement" problem

Sometimes ignoring the answer starts even before the sales pitch. It starts with a question that forces agreement. For example,

- "Do you want a peaceful and prosperous town?"
- "Should people care about the destruction of our natural environment?"
- "Do you want to make $300 a day online by clicking a button?"

These are "questions." But they aren't legitimate. There's no sense of *actually* being interested in the other person or their response. This is like giving a prepared line, then saying, "Right?"

The "fast money" problem

Even a good question feels bogus if it's *immediately* followed by a financial ask. This timing ruins the question. It feels like a "setup," not an expression of authentic interest.

This is why charities should never ask for money in a donor survey. Some charities struggle with the idea of *any* mailing that doesn't ask for cash. But in this case, it's a bad idea. The immediate ask de-legitimizes the questions.[10] It creates the feeling, "You didn't actually care what I thought. You just wanted money."

Conversations can *eventually* lead to a challenge. But it's important not to jump to the end of the journey. The goal of each step is only to get to *the next* step.

Approach 2: I need your help or advice

I need your advice (student version)

Over the years, I've taught thousands of university students. For most, the scariest challenge is getting their first real job. I encourage students to go to professional conferences and "network." But how do they turn "networking" into a J-O-B? I start with the adage,

> "If you want advice, ask for a job. If you want a job, ask for advice."

[10] It's fine to ask for opinions or preferences about different forms of giving, but it's not OK to ask for a check.

Why does this work? Because when a student asks for advice about entering a field,

- It gives honor. (It says, "You know something important.")
- It promises impact. (It says, "You can change my life.")
- It shows what's important to the employer. (It asks, "How do I become your ideal candidate?")

I need your advice (fundraiser version)

This approach can also work for fundraising. Asking for advice can be powerful. It gives honor. It promises impact. It gets the donor to define what *they* think is important.

Asking for advice gives honor. It says,

- "You are important."
- "I care about your opinion."
- "You know important things that I don't."

Asking for advice also promises impact. The question implies a need – a gap in knowledge. By filling this gap with wisdom, the donor can make a difference.

Finally, asking for advice shows what's important to the donor. He will happily describe how his ideal charity ought to behave. Following up later with a challenge that matches this vision can be powerful.

Why do you need my help or advice?

Asking for advice can be powerful. But the desire for advice must be real. It's important to answer the question, "Why?" "Why do you need my advice?" Some reasons are

- I'm new here.
- We have a problem.
- We have an idea.
- You're in charge.

I need your advice… because I'm new here

One of the easiest ways to get donors to answer questions is when the person asking is new. Got a new dean? A new executive director? A new development director? A new fundraiser? It's time for a "listening tour."

Go see donors. Ask for advice. The "new guy" justification is obvious. It's compelling. It provides honor. It promises impact. And it allows the donor to explain what's important to him.

I need your advice… because we have a problem

Nothing motivates advice-giving better than a good problem. There are many problems donors can give advice about.

Maybe budget constraints mean only one of three projects can be funded this year. That's a good reason to ask donors about the importance to them of each project.

Maybe the number of new people joining the legacy society has dropped. That's a reason to ask for donor opinions about helping in this way.[11]

One of my favorite stories from planned giving marketing illustrates this. A charity's attempts at planned giving seminars had all failed. Finally, in frustration, they decided to … ask their donors for advice.

They held a donor focus group about the problem. Why won't anyone come to our seminars? The donors gave advice. But along the way,

> "The participants, in order to give advice about workshops on planned giving, had to ask questions about CRTs and CGAs, and, as they listened to our explanations, they learned what these acronyms stood for and how they could,

[11] Concept from Sargeant, A. & Stergiou, C. (2019, January 10). Personal communication. Message from Christiana Stergiou, Co-Founder of Moceanic, referencing text copy originating from Adrian Sargeant, Co-Founder of Institute for Sustainable Philanthropy.

> indeed, benefit the charity as well as themselves and their families."[12]

What happened? The charity got planned gifts *the next day* from donors in the focus group. The fundraisers explained,

> "Thus, like a scientist who discovers a cure unexpectedly, we had inadvertently found our answer where we least expected it: the best venue to teach people about planned giving was not a workshop or a seminar but a focus group... [on] why no one seems willing to learn about planned giving by attending the workshops ..."[13]

Success came when they stopped lecturing and started asking. Asking was justified by a real problem.

I need your advice... because we have an idea

Instead of a problem, the justification might be an opportunity. We have an idea. We need your advice. For example,

> "We've been exploring the possibility of opening a new center near you. A few questions have come up. Would you be willing to share your thoughts on this?"

[12] Bigelow, Bruce E. & Kolmerten, Carol A. (2008, April) Focusing on planned giving: Using focus groups to find new donors. *Journal of Gift Planning, 12*(2), 18-21, 44-45. http://charitabledevelopmentconsulting.com/s/Focusing-on-Planned-Giving-Using-Focus-Groups-to-Find-New-Donors.pdf
[13] *Id.*

This also justifies questions in a campaign "feasibility study."[14] This says,

> "We have a plan. But it depends on donors like you. So, we need to know your thoughts about the plan and your interest in supporting it."

I need your advice... because you're in charge

Some donors might be able to fund an entire project. But every donor is part of the group that controls the charity's donations. That makes their voice important.[15]

Beyond this, donors might have formal authority. They might be trustees. They might be in advisory groups. In any case, treating them *as if* they're in charge permits questions. It justifies asking for advice.

As before, these also work as reasons to ask for a meeting. For example,

- We need "to get your take on something."[16]

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[14] A great example is provide on page 63 of Kihlstedt, A. (2009). *Capital campaigns: Strategies that work*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers. (In preparing the preliminary case for support, the consultant asked, "Where is your DRAFT stamp?" She explained, "so we can stamp the copies of the case document we're preparing. If we don't leave opportunities for the members of the committee to add their ideas, they'll feel they've been presented with a *fait accompli*, and we will have lost a great chance to build ownership in this project.")

[15] Of course, asking for advice may not fit the administrator-hero story. In that view, the administrators are the experts and the heroes. Donors are supposed to give and get out of the way. Beyond their wallet, they have nothing useful to add.

[16] Muir, R. (2018). *Get the visit, nail the ask! 10 ways to get the visit*. [Blog]. https://www.rachelmuir.com/ask

- We need "to get feedback on an upcoming project."[17]
- We need "to tell you about the project and get your good counsel and advice as to what steps might be taken next to move the project forward."[18]
- We need "to get your feedback on a recent study related to (this organization)."[19]

Approach 3: I can help or advise you

The third approach leads with value. One definition of permission marketing is when

> "Customers agree (opt-in) to be involved in an organization's marketing activities … in return for value offered."[20]

Why should they meet with us? Why should they answer our questions? Because we provide benefit. We can help them. In the donor's hero story, this is the role of the guiding sage. The guiding sage

- Provides wisdom and advice

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[17] Miree, K. (2009, October). *Critical donor messages in a difficult environment.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning. p. 18.
[18] Panas, J. (2020). *Asking: A 59-minute guide to everything board members, volunteers, and staff must know to secure the gift.* Emerson & Church. p. 96.
[19] Gillespie, J. E. (2005, September 29). *Hello… are you there? Good phone Karma.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving.
[20] Chaffey, D. & Bosomworth, D. (2012). *Digital marketing strategy guide*. https://www.academia.edu/8960572/DIGITAL_MARKETING_STRATEGY_GUIDE_Your_companion_to_creating_or_updating_your_online_channel_strategy_Authors_Dr_Dave_Chaffey_and_Danyl_Bosomworth

- Delivers magical instruments to help in the hero's journey
- Introduces the hero to friends and allies who can also help.

Leading with value is powerful. One study asked nearly 3,000 people what they most wanted to read about on their favorite charity's website.[21] The share "definitely interested in reading more" was

- 3% for "Gift planning," but
- 20% for "Other ways to give smarter."

What did they expect to see when clicking on each phrase? The answers were nearly identical for both. The expected information *was the same*.

So, why was interest six times greater for the second phrase? Because it led with value. It was about helping the donor.

Who at a charity would people ask for help with donating stocks?[22] One study asked over 3,000

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[21] James, R. N., III. (2018). Creating understanding and interest in charitable financial and estate planning: An experimental test of introductory phrases. *Journal of Personal Finance, 17*(2), 9-21. (The experiment asked, "Suppose you are viewing the website of a charity representing a cause that is important in your life. In addition to a "Donate Now" button, the following buttons appear on the website. Please rate your level of interest in clicking on the button to read the corresponding information. Note: after answering this set of questions, you will be asked to read information about one of these topics. Please rate the ones you are actually interested in more highly than those you are less interested in.")

[22] James, R. N., III. (2016). Testing the effectiveness of fundraiser job titles in charitable bequest and complex gift planning. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 27*(2), 165-179.

people this question. Job titles indicating, "I help donors" were attractive. People were three times more likely to say they would "definitely contact" a

- "Director of Donor Advising," or
- "Director of Donor Guidance"

than a

- "Director of Advancement."

Helping donors isn't limited to technical advice. Maybe it's,

- "I help people plan out their gifts and the impact they want to make."[23] Or,
- "I help donors give smarter."

A job description can provide yet another reason to meet. If my job is to meet with donors, this also implies, "I need your help." If donors won't agree to meet with me, I can't do my job![24]

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[23] *See also,* "What I do for [organization] is help people uncover their philanthropic goals and help structure their gifts to meet those goals. I'm not going to ask you for a gift today, but I do want to ask if it is alright if I start working with you?" from De Luca, C. C. (2020, May 4). Personal communication. Carolina Camargo De Luca, Discovery Officer, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center – El Paso

[24] Or, for a volunteer, "I promised I'd call on all of those I was assigned to. I made that commitment. And you're one of the important ones I feel I really must see." Panas, J. (2020). *Asking: A 59-minute guide to everything board members, volunteers, and staff must know to secure the gift.* Emerson & Church. p. 35.
Or, in another example, "Our bylaws require us to report personally to at least 20% of our top donors. You've been such a loyal friend to the organization. I would love to update you about the latest happenings at [the charity]. Would it a problem for us to have a brief visit sometime next week?"

Leading with value works. “I can help” works. It justifies the fundraiser asking questions. It justifies the donor answering those questions.

Blending reasons to meet

Meeting just to “update” the donor might not promise value. But the right phrasing can build this impression. For example,

- “I want to update you on the many exciting things happening at the [organization]. I think you’ll be amazed and impressed at the impact”[25] of your gifts.
- “The truth is, I couldn’t do it justice on the phone. I have a feeling this is something you’re going to be interested in, and I have some photographs and material I want to share with you. You’re going to find this important.”[26]

Or the update might be just one of many reasons to meet. For example,

- “You’ve already been generous to [this charity], and I want to thank you and learn more about your connection to our ... services. We have some long-term plans for the [new project],

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[25] Makous, B. B. (2009, October 16). *The art of the ask.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, Maryland. p.8

[26] Panas, J. (2020). *Asking: A 59-minute guide to everything board members, volunteers, and staff must know to secure the gift.* Emerson & Church. p. 33.

and I'm thinking you might appreciate a preview."[27]

- "I want to thank you in person for your past support and better understand your experience working with our organization … and I'd like to share some aspects of our work that you might not be aware of."[28]
- "I'm calling to thank you for your recent gift. You've been a long-time supporter of our organization, and we're reaching out to women like you to ask your opinion of some of our future plans. I'd like to take the opportunity to say "thank you" in person and to fill you in on what's happening here. Would you be available to meet with me for lunch next week?"[29]

Of course, many reasons to meet can be blended even without an "update." These next approaches by Katherine Swank stack reasons together.

- "I am calling to introduce myself. My role here is to get to know our donors and personally thank them for their support of our work. You have been very generous to us and our work; I would like to have the opportunity to find out

[27] Pittman-Schulz, K. (2012, October). *In the door and then what?* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 22.
[28] *Id.* at 10-11.
[29] Swank, K. (2009, October). *What women want: Understanding the needs and objectives of women's philanthropic giving, including planned gifts.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 8.

more about why you give and get your opinion on how we are doing in your eyes. Would it be possible for me to set up a time to meet with you for 30 minutes or so?"[30]

- "I am new to the organization and to the area and hope to meet as many loyal donors as is possible in the next few weeks. The president has suggested that you would be a very important person for me to meet. I'm hopeful that you might have 30 minutes in the next two weeks to meet me for breakfast, lunch, or another convenient time."[31]

Nope…

Sometimes, we still get a "no." When this happens, we want to know why. Uncovering the objection then allows for a response. The response should

1. Affirm the concern and the person, then
2. Cite others' solutions.

Examples might sound like this.

- OBJECTION: I don't like people coming to my house.
- RESPONSE: I understand. Many people I meet with feel just like you do. They like to meet at a coffee shop. Or I could just pick you up and take you to brunch. Would your

[30] *Id.*
[31] *Id.*

calendar allow us to meet Thursday at 10:30 in the morning?[32]

- OBJECTION: I'm very busy right now.
- RESPONSE: I understand. This is often the case with our most important donors like you. Many prefer a quick meeting of just 15-20 minutes. "I don't know when I'll be in your area again, and I bet your schedule stays pretty busy most of the time. Shall we try for 15-20 minutes on Tuesday morning at 10:15? I'll bring two cups of fresh coffee, listen fast, then let you get back to your day."[33]

- OBJECTION: I can't give more, so it would be a waste of time.
- RESPONSE: I understand. Many friends who've been with us as many years as you have are in the same situation. That's not a concern. This meeting isn't about a gift, I just want to ...

But even our best responses will sometimes get a "no." And that's OK. There are many ways to continue to build connections.

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[32] Pitman, M. A. (2008). *Ask without fear! A simple guide to connecting donors with what matters to them most.* Tremendous Life Books. p. 35. ("When setting up appointments, I like asking if their "calendar would allow" us to meet at such-and-such a time… I find that wording makes the process of setting up an appointment less confrontational.")

[33] Pittman-Schulz, K. (2012, October). *In the door and then what?* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 22.

We can invite them to an event or a tour. We can call to thank them for their third or fifth or tenth year of giving. We can make a personal video with a phone reporting the impact of their gift. We can call to ask for opinions and advice.

These lead to conversations. Conversations lead to relationships. Relationships change yesterday's "no" into tomorrow's "yes."

Conclusion

When it reflects authentic interest, Socratic fundraising is powerful. It can connect the donor's identity with the cause or charity. It can uncover a personally meaningful victory. Ultimately, it can deliver value to the donor. But it starts with permission. It starts with, "Can I ask you a question?"

4

Socratic Fundraising Backstory:

Questions that Connect with The Donor's Identity

Beginning the narrative arc

If there is one key rule in storytelling, it is this: The main character must *want* something. This motivation starts with backstory.

In backstory, we learn who the main character is. We learn about his people, values, and history. (This is his *original identity*). Later, we'll learn his goal. (This is the *victory*). An inciting incident will force a choice. (This is the *challenge*.) It will force a choice to go on a journey to pursue that goal.

But this pursuit is compelling only because we know *why* the goal is important to him. The goal must link to his people, values, and history. It must connect with his backstory.

If there is one key rule in fundraising, it is this: The donor must *want* something the charity can offer. This motivation starts with the donor's backstory.

In backstory, we learn who the donor is. We learn about his people, values, and history as it relates to the cause. (This is his *original identity*.) Later, we'll learn his philanthropic goal. (This is the *victory*.) A compelling ask will force a choice. (This is the *challenge*.) It will force a choice to make a gift to pursue that goal.

But this pursuit is compelling only because the donor knows *why* the goal is important to him. The goal must link to his people, values, and history. It must connect with his backstory.

Openings

No story can be a powerful fundraising story until it becomes *the donor's* story. This happens when the donor *identifies with* the story's people, values, or plot. Questions can help. Questions can uncover connections with the donor's identity.

The donor's identity comes from the donor's backstory. It comes from the donor's

- History (life story),
- People (family and identifying community), and
- Values.

Questions or prompts can link the charity or cause with this identity. For example,

- "Tell me about your connection to [this charity]."
- "How has [this cause] been important in your life?"
- "Have others in your life been affected by [this cause]?"

Questions can explicitly connect with origins. For example,

- "When did you first get interested in [this cause]?"
- "Is there anyone in your family history who also cared about [this cause]?"

This can even inspire monomyth framing. The origin connections become the starting point in the donor-hero's journey. For example,

- "Tell me about your journey since you graduated from the university."[1]
- "Tell me about your journey since you were first diagnosed."

[1] Vidmar, T. (2020, May 1). Personal communication. Tony Vidmar, VP University Advancement and Public Affairs, Midwestern State University. (Tony adds this important comment on the phrasing, "I specifically say the name of the institution and usually in the informal vernacular—i.e. "Tech" for Texas Tech University or "Ohio State" for The Ohio State University or "Midwestern" (or MSU Texas) for Midwestern State University. By doing so, I convey hopefully a commonality that we have as both being "intimate" enough with the institution and it's culture to be comfortable enough and "cool enough" to use the informal vernacular."

- “Tell me about your journey since you first became involved in [this cause].”

This might look like simple information gathering. And, yes, that does happen. But the questions are important even if we already know the answer.

The questions are powerful because *the donor* is answering them. Restating a connection or belief strengthens it.[2] This encourages actions that match. In fundraising, this encourages donations.

Does it work? Let’s look at some experimental results.

Experiment 1

In one experiment[3] some people were simply told about causes. They read,

> “Charity includes organizations supporting causes such as environmental conservation, cancer research, animal welfare, international relief for the poor and needy, and youth activities.”

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[2] Fazio, R. H., Chen, J. M., McDonel, E. C., & Sherman, S. J. (1982). Attitude accessibility, attitude-behavior consistency, and the strength of the object-evaluation association. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 18*(4), 339-357; Glasman, L. R., & Albarracín, D. (2006). Forming attitudes that predict future behavior: A meta-analysis of the attitude-behavior relation. *Psychological Bulletin, 132*(5), 778–822.

[3] James, R. N., III. (2018). Increasing charitable donation intentions with preliminary importance ratings. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing. 15*(3), 393-411.

Others were instead asked questions. They were asked to rate the importance of the causes. They read,

> "Please rate the importance of the work of charities in the following areas: environmental conservation, cancer research, animal welfare, international relief to the poor and needy, and youth activities." [The response scale was from "0=absolutely no importance" to "100=absolutely the greatest importance"]

Did asking questions make a difference? Yes. The likelihood of donating to the American Cancer Society was 17% for the first group. It was 26% for the second. For the National Breast Cancer Foundation, the increase was from 15% to 23%. For UNICEF, it went from 12% to 17%. For CARE, it went from 9% to 14%. For YMCA/YWCA it went from 11% to 16%. For all ten charities tested across all five cause types, the outcome was the same. The likelihood of donating always went up. Questions worked.

Experiment 2

In another experiment, people were asked to donate to conserve the environment. But some were first asked an identity question. They were asked to describe "ways in which they would have a positive impact on future generations."[4] Those people donated nearly 50% more.

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[4] Zaval, L., Markowitz, E. M., & Weber, E. U. (2015). How will I be remembered? Conserving the environment for the sake of one's legacy. *Psychological Science, 26*(2), 231-236, 233.

Why? Further analysis gave the answer. This question increased concern for "what future generations think of me."[5] It increased interest in leaving a positive "legacy" or "mark on society." The question highlighted the importance of one aspect of the donor's identity. That aspect connected to the charitable cause. (Environmental conservation has a "positive impact on future generations.") As a result, donations increased.

Experiment 3

A later experiment[6] tested willingness to donate to The Nature Conservancy. Some were first asked about their desired future identity. (This was like the prior experiment.[7]) Others were asked about their life history with conservation.[8] Still others were asked about family connections to conservation.[9]

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[5] *Id.* at 233.

[6] James, R. N., III. (2016, March 7). *Using biasing questions in charitable bequest surveys.* Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2744006 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2744006

[7] "Please rate the importance to you of the following" regarding (1) "Being a good example for the next generation," (2) "Making a lasting impact in the world," and (3) "Insuring that your values will be remembered by future generations." The available ratings were "None," "Slightly important," "Somewhat important," "Important," and "Highly important."

[8] "At what age did you first begin to think about the importance of conserving the natural environment?" with the available answers of "In childhood," "In high school," "In my 20s," "In my 30s or later," and "I have never thought about the importance of conserving the natural environment." Followed by, "Which of the following have been important in your life? (check any that apply)," with the available options of "Time I have spent outdoors," "Time I have spent on a river," "Time I have spent in a forest," "Time I have spent on a lake," "My life experiences with wildlife," "My life experiences with wild birds," and "My life experiences with trees and plants."

[9] "Do you have more or less than two family members who consider conserving the natural environment to be important?" with the available

Donation likelihood went up

- Slightly for the future identity questions,
- More for the life history questions, and
- Even more for the family connection questions.

However, it went up the most for those who were asked *all three* sets of questions. Each type of identity connection helped encourage the gift. Questions worked. More questions worked better.

Bequest experiments

Linking with the donor's identity can also work with bequest gifts. One experiment searched for the best description of a charitable bequest gift. It tested 24 different descriptions in four iterative rounds. Nearly 10,000 people responded.[10] The description most likely to trigger giving was

> "Make a gift to charity in your will to support causes that have been important in your life."

This description links

- Values ("*important*"),

options of "About 2," "More than 2," and "Less than 2." Followed by, "Were there any family members in your life who were particularly influential in shaping your views on the importance of nature conservation? (Check any that apply)" with the available options of "Grandmother," "Grandfather," "Aunt," "Uncle," "Mother," "Father," "Sibling," and "Other family member."

[10] James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(2), 998-1011.

- Life history ("important *in your life*"),
- A cause ("*causes that have been* important in your life"), and
- A gift ("*a gift… to support* causes that have been important in your life").

A neuroimaging study found similar results.[11] People were asked about making bequest gifts to different charities. As "autobiographical visualization" increased, so did intentions to make the gift. The neural signature for life story connections predicted bequest giving intentions.

A qualitative study found similar results.[12] It interviewed people with charitable bequest plans. It asked them why they picked those charities. The answer? These charities linked with their life stories.

Life story reminiscence can be powerful. But it's most powerful during older ages.[13] This is when

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[11] James, R. N., III., & O'Boyle, M. W. (2014). Charitable estate planning as visualized autobiography: An fMRI study of its neural correlates. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 43*(2), 355-373.

[12] "Indeed, when discussing which charities they had chosen to remember, there was a clear link with the life narratives of many respondents." Routley, C. J. (2011). *Leaving a charitable legacy: Social influence, the self and symbolic immortality* [Ph.D. dissertation]. University of the West of England, Bristol, UK, p. 220.

[13] Reminiscing about the distant past is also a particularly effective way to communicate with older adults or those with diminished capacity to generate new memories. *See* Hyppa-Martin, J. & Hofmann, R. (2018, October). *Stewarding donors with dementia*. [Paper presentation]. National Association of Charitable Gift Planners Conference, Las Vegas, NV; Bohling, H. R. (1991). Communication with AD patients: An analysis of caregiver listening patterns. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 33*(4), 249-267, 252. Ripich, D. N., Wykle, M., & Niles, S. (1995). Alzheimer's disease caregivers: The FOCUSED program: A communication skills training program helps nursing

major lifetime or legacy gift decisions are often made.[14]

In another experiment[15] people increased bequest gift intentions when asked about

- Family member connections to the cause, and
- A tribute or memorial bequest gift honoring the family member.

This worked for all 30 charities tested.[16] These came from 13 different cause types.

In all these experiments, the answer was the same. Linking the charity or cause with the donor's identity (history, people, or values) worked. A compelling story starts with backstory. It starts with identity.

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assistants to give better care to patients with alzheimer's disease. *Geriatric Nursing, 16*(1), 15-19.

[14] James, R. N., III. III. (2020). The emerging potential of longitudinal empirical research in estate planning: Examples from charitable bequests. *UC Davis Law Review, 53*, 2397-2431

[15] James, R. N., III. (2015). The family tribute in charitable bequest giving: An experimental test of the effect of reminders on giving intentions. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 26*(1), 73-89.

[16] UNICEF; CARE; The American Diabetes Association; The Joslin Diabetes Center; World Wildlife Fund; Wildlife Conservation Society; National Breast Cancer Foundation; Breast Cancer Research Foundation; Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation; The Alzheimer's Association; The Alzheimer's Foundation of America; The American Humane Association; The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; The Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America; Boys and Girls Clubs of America; YMCA; YWCA; Girl Scouts; or Boy Scouts; Prevent Blindness America or Foundation Fighting Blindness; National Cancer Coalition; the American Cancer Society; The MD Anderson Cancer Center; or the Dana Farber Cancer Institute); United Negro College Fund; American Indian College Fund; Ducks Unlimited or The National Audubon Society; AIDS Project Los Angeles or San Francisco AIDS Foundation; Canine Companions for Independence; Guide Dogs for the Blind.

Social norms experiments

One of the most powerful messages in giving experiments is the social norm. This is the message that “people like me do things like this.” It shows that the donor’s community supports the values, the charity, and the donation. It connects the gift with standing in the community. It connects the gift with a source of the donor’s identity.

The social norm works. But experiments show one thing works even better. *Asking questions* about the social norm.

One field experiment asked people to give to a local child relief charity. With just this request, 48% gave. Others were first told that 2/3 of people in the country gave to charity last year. In this group, 61% gave. (This is the social norm effect.) Before being told this, another group first answered a question. They guessed the share of people who gave to charity last year. In this group, 78% gave.[17] Asking worked better than just telling.

In one lab experiment, people could choose to give to other players or not.[18] There were three groups.

- In the normal group, one-third chose to give.

[17] Bartke, S., Friedl, A., Gelhaar, F., & Reh, L. (2017). Social comparison nudges—Guessing the norm increases charitable giving. *Economics Letters, 152*, 73-75.
[18] Krupka, E., & Weber, R. A. (2009). The focusing and informational effects of norms on pro-social behavior. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 30*(3), 307-320.

- In a second group, people first answered a question. They guessed the share of others who had given in previous games. In this group, two-thirds gave. Asking about others' giving actions doubled giving.
- In a third group, people first answered a different question. They guessed the share of others who had said that people *should* give. In this group, 72% gave. Asking about others' giving *beliefs* more than doubled giving.

Another lab experiment found the same effect for donations to charity.[19]

In giving decisions, social norms are powerful. But, here too, the same rule applies. Asking works better than telling.

The magic of follow-up questions

The opening starts the conversation. It asks about a connection with the donor's history, people, or values. But the real power comes in the follow-up questions.

[19] Asking participants to guess the hare of people who had given in previous games significantly increased charitable giving. This worked both when people's decisions were private [labeled SelfSig BE] and when they were being watched by others [labeled SocSig BE]. Bolton, G., Dimant, E., & Schmidt, U. (2020). *When a Nudge Backfires: Combining (Im)Plausible Deniability with Social and Economic Incentives to Promote Behavioral Change*. CESinfo Working Paper No. 8070, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3531419

Follow-up questions ask the speaker to elaborate.[20] Generic versions include,

- "How do you mean?"
- "What else?"
- "What happened next?"
- "Really? Tell me more."

Even better is the two-part follow-up question. The first part asks for elaboration. The second part reflects something the speaker just said. This shows interest *and* active listening.

- "Tell me more about …."
- "What happened after you …?"
- "What's an example of …?"
- "How does … fit into the picture?"

Reflective communication isn't just about words. James Gillespie explains,

> "It often helps to match or mirror your pitch, inflection, and rate of speech with your prospect's voice patterns."[21]

Anne Melvin adds,

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[20] Davis, D. (1982). Determinants of responsiveness in dyadic interaction. In W. Ickes & E. S. Knowles (Eds.), *Personality, roles, and social behavior* (pp. 85-139). Springer-Verlag; Huang, K., Yeomans, M., Brooks, A. W., Minson, J., & Gino, F. (2017). It doesn't hurt to ask: Question-asking increases liking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 113*(3), 430-452, 430.
[21] Gillespie, J. E. (2005, September 29). *Hello... are you there? Good phone Karma*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving.

> "Be conscious of matching the donor's body language and word choice. I'm an energetic, fast speaker, but I slow my speech down and lower my energy level to match that of a donor when necessary."[22]

Follow-up questions and reflective communication work. They elicit information. But they do more. They show we care.

Follow-up questions in research

Many experienced fundraisers will say, "It's all about relationships." And that's often true. But how can we make this happen? Research provides some insights.

Questions can help. People who elicit personal information are better liked. This is particularly true in long-term relationships.[23] Several experiments showed

> "people who ask more questions, particularly follow-up questions, are better liked by their conversation partners ..."[24]

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[22] Collins, M. E. (2017, Winter). The Ask. *Advancing Philanthropy*, 16-23, p. 18. Quoting Anne T. Melvin, J.D., Director of training and education, Alumni affairs and development at Harvard University.
[23] Miller, L. C., Berg, J. H., & Archer, R. L. (1983). Openers: Individuals who elicit intimate self-disclosure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44*, 1234-1244.
[24] Huang, K., Yeomans, M., Brooks, A. W., Minson, J., & Gino, F. (2017). It doesn't hurt to ask: Question-asking increases liking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 113*(3), 430-452, 430. *See also*, Yeomans, M., Brooks, A., Huang, K., Minson, J., & Gino, F. (2019). It helps to ask: The cumulative benefits of asking follow-up questions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 117*(6), 1139-1144.

This even works for dating. One experiment found

> "speed daters who ask more follow-up questions during their dates are more likely to elicit agreement for second dates ..." [25]

Questions can help. But in experiments, not all questions worked. Introductory questions didn't do much. These were questions like,

> "Hey, how's it going?"

Questions that switched topics could actually hurt. These were questions like,

> Person A: "I am working at a dry cleaners."
>
> Person B: "What do you like doing for fun?"[26]

Socratic fundraising involves questions. But these are questions from active listening.[27] They are questions of appreciative inquiry. They are follow-up questions. Researchers explain,

> "follow-up questions seem to have special power. They signal to your conversation partner that you are listening, care, and want to know more. People interacting with a partner

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[25] Huang, K., Yeomans, M., Brooks, A. W., Minson, J., & Gino, F. (2017). It doesn't hurt to ask: Question-asking increases liking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 113*(3), 430-452, 430.
[26] *Id.* at Tables 2 & 3, p. 439.
[27] Weger, H., Jr., Bell, G. R. C., Minei, E. M., & Robinson, M. C. (2014). The relative effectiveness of active listening in initial interactions. *International Journal of Listening, 28*, 13-31.

> who asks lots of follow-up questions tend to feel respected and heard."[28]

One early study called those skilled at eliciting information, "Openers."[29] How were such people different? On personality scales, they scored high[30] in

- Perspective taking
- Sociability
- Self-esteem, and
- Awareness of one's own thoughts and feelings.

In conversation experiments, these "Openers" behaved differently. Researchers found,

> "In addition to being more receptive and attentive, high openers may also actively elicit more disclosure from their partners by asking more follow-up questions."[31]

Follow-up questions work. They elicit information. They build relationships. But the fundraiser is not just being friendly. The fundraiser is the guiding sage in the donor's hero story.

The questions have a point. The point is to connect the donor's original identity with the cause or

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[28] Brooks, A. W., & John, L. K. (2018). The surprising power of questions. *Harvard Business Review, 96*(3), 60-67

[29] Miller, L. C., Berg, J. H., & Archer, R. L. (1983). Openers: Individuals who elicit intimate self-disclosure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44*, 1234-1244.

[30] *Id.* at p. 1237, Table 3.

[31] *Id.* at p. 1242.

the charity. This is the first step in the donor-hero's journey.

Why the first step isn't enough

This first step reminds donors of their connections to the charity. This encourages support. But this, by itself, will never motivate a major gift. Why not?

Consider this. Suppose a donor loves our charity. So, he donates $100. Great! But how can we motivate a gift of $1,000? Can we make the donor love our charity *ten times more* than he already does? Probably not.

Instead, we need to move beyond just connecting the donor to the charity. To get the rest of the gift, we need the rest of the story. We need to uncover a personally meaningful victory. We need to find a victory that is *worth* ten times more *to the donor*.

How? By asking questions.

5

SOCRATIC FUNDRAISING FORESHADOWING: QUESTIONS THAT UNCOVER A MEANINGFUL VICTORY

A compelling fundraising challenge will connect with the donor's identity. This begins with backstory. Backstory connects the cause, charity, or project with the donor's history, people, or values. This encourages giving.

But for larger gifts we need more. We need a challenge that promises a victory. And not just any victory. We need a victory that is personally meaningful for the donor. We need a victory that delivers an enhanced identity. And how do we discover this? Socratic fundraising can help.

The ultimate victory question

There are many "victory" questions. An open-ended one is this:

> "What would you like to accomplish with your money that would be meaningful to you?"[1]

This question is powerful. It connects

- Challenge ("your money"),
- Victory ("accomplish"), and
- Identity ("meaningful to you").

This one question contains the full story cycle. It really says,

> "Tell me your ideal donor-hero story."

Asking this victory question can be powerful. When it works, it quickly identifies a compelling outcome for the donor. It gives the fundraiser the precise parameters for the perfect ask.

But it doesn't always work. Giving an accurate answer can be difficult. Many will respond, "I don't know." Others might say, "I'll have to think about that." Or the answer might be something the charity can't do.

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[1] Advancement Resources. (2017, November 15). *The power of the pause: Using silence in donor conversations* [blog]. https://advancementresources.org/the-power-of-the-pause-using-silence-in-donor-conversations/
See also, "What would you want to do with your money that is meaningful to you?" in Shaw-Hardy, S., Taylor, M. A., & Beaudoin-Schwartz, B. (2010). *Women and philanthropy: Boldly shaping a better world*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 115, quoting from Advancement Resources. (2006). *The art and science of donor development workbook*. Advancement Resources, LLC.

Other types of “victory questions” can address these issues.

Narrowing the victory question to giving

Another version restricts the answer to philanthropy. It asks,

> “What would you like to accomplish *with your giving* that would be meaningful to you?”

This question avoids answers like, “providing a secure future for my family.” That *is* a meaningful thing a person can do with money. But it’s not usually something the charity can offer.[2]

The tradeoff is this: This version changes the financial reference point for the challenge. It doesn’t bring to mind the *big* bucket of “your money.” It references only the *small* bucket of “your giving.”

Another version lightens the question. It asks,

> “What would you like to accomplish with your giving?”

This question is easier. The donor can define a victory without contemplating the meaning of life.

The tradeoff is this: Meaning questions are hard questions. But they’re powerful questions. The ultimate benefit from donating is enhanced identity.

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[2] The exception here would be for those trained in sophisticated planned giving in the U.S. where many instrument combinations actually can provide this outcome along with charitable giving.

This is meaning (private) or reputation (public). The typical use for more money – more consumption (houses, cars, holidays) – can't deliver meaning. In sales terms, meaning questions lead with "product" benefit.

Narrowing the victory question to giving here

Other versions restrict the story to one cause or charity. For example,

- "What would you like to accomplish with your giving in [this cause]?"
- "What would you like to accomplish with your money at [this charity] that would be meaningful to you?"

The original question fits broad-mission charities. A community foundation can accommodate most any cause. So can a large research university. But many charities represent a narrow cause. Triggering a conversation about an unrelated charitable passion might not be helpful.

The tradeoff is this: The question narrows the scope of the relationship. It can imply,

> "I'm not your life advisor. I'm not your wealth advisor. I'm not even your philanthropy advisor. I'm only here to talk about my organization."

This may feel more efficient. But it also limits the possibility for a broader conversation. These more comprehensive discussions are powerful. They can lead to larger gifts.

Challenges for open-ended victory questions

Open-ended victory questions can be powerful. But they require a lot from the donor. He must know a lot about himself. He must know a lot about possible projects. And he must fit both together to form a compelling goal.

But even if the donor identifies his ideal victory, there's another problem. This doesn't work unless the fundraiser has the power to ask for that gift. In many charities, that's just not reality. Getting such a proposal approved wouldn't be merely difficult.

It would border on offensive. Charity managers can think,

> "Why isn't this fundraiser out getting unrestricted cash? Doesn't she understand *we* are supposed to make the decisions? Doesn't she know *we* are the experts. [Doesn't she realize *we* are the heroes here?]"

Now what? What if the fundraiser doesn't have this kind of freedom? What if the donor doesn't have this kind of insight?

Moving to the victory menu

Menus can be powerful in fundraising. They provide clear, simple, attractive options. Each option has a specific price. Making an ask becomes less risky. If it doesn't match, it's right next to other options.

Menus make decisions easier. They make the outcomes obvious and visualizable. They're powerful. They're easier for the fundraiser. Menus contain pre-approved options. Although ordering "off-menu" may be possible, it's rare.

A victory menu is narrower than an open-ended victory question. But Socratic fundraising is still possible. One experiment showed this.[3] People read about fifteen charity projects across five causes.[4] (This is like an example menu.) Half were also asked

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[3] James, R. N., III. (2015). The family tribute in charitable bequest giving: An experimental test of the effect of reminders on giving intentions. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 26*(1), 73-89.

[4] The Nature Conservancy
- preserve wetlands for wild ducks and other migrating birds,
- protect and restore ancient sequoia and redwood forests in the U.S.,
- protect sensitive coral reefs around the globe

The American Cancer Society
- research for cures to the most deadly cancers,
- provide treatment to patients in need,
- provide public education on reducing the risk of cancer

Your local animal shelter
- provide veterinary care for animals in need,
- increase adoption of shelter pets needing a home,
- investigate and stop animal cruelty in your area

UNICEF
- provide clean water to impoverished children in need,
- provide immunizations to children around the world,
- provide emergency relief to victims of a natural disaster

The Boys and Girls Clubs of America
- provide youth education programs helping with success in school,
- provide youth sports and recreation programs,
- provide youth arts and creativity programs

to rate the importance of each project.[5] (This is like a "Socratic" menu.)

Everyone was then asked about making *unrestricted* gifts. Across ten charities tested, the likelihood of giving averaged

- 15% for the simple menu group, and
- 21% for the "Socratic" menu group.

Asking preliminary questions made the menu more powerful.

Defining victory after the legacy gift

Socratic fundraising leads up to a challenge. But what if the donor has already decided on a gift amount? What if he's already made the gift? Is it too late? Not necessarily.

This is a common issue in legacy fundraising. Often, the charity learns of the gift only *after* it's planned. A donor joins the legacy society. Or he fills out a survey revealing the charity is in his will. That's great! But what if we want to know

- How much is it?
- Can it be more?

[5] "On a scale from 0=Absolutely No Importance to 100 = Absolutely The Greatest Importance; please rate the importance of the work of [organization] in the following areas ..."

These are relevant fundraising questions. But they're also potentially offensive.

Imagine a family reunion. Great Aunt Rose mentions to her nephew,

> "I just want you to know, I've included you in my will."

The nephew responds,

> "That's great Aunt Rose! Thank you.... Umm, just so I can plan out my future budgets, could you tell me how much I'm getting? And would you consider increasing the amount?"

That feels a little uncomfortable, right? Yet this is the position of many legacy fundraisers. They want to get credit for the gift amount. They want to make it bigger.

The "planning for the future" excuse is common. But it's a little odd. The charity doesn't know when the donor will die. By then the estate or the gift may have changed. Sometimes the excuse is about reaching campaign goals. Still, even this may leave some donors unmoved.

Socratic fundraising suggests another approach. Help the donor define a personally meaningful victory. After thanking the donor for the gift, this can start with a question. For example,

> "Have you thought about how you would like your gift to be used?"[6]

This can lead to conversations about the impact of different gifts. The fundraiser might even share a story about another donor. For example,

> "The reason I ask is that you remind me of another donor. He was also ... [*reference personal similarity*]. He also cared about ... [*reference shared values*]. He set up a gift in his will to create a permanent endowment. He named it after his mother. The endowment ... [*describe the impact and the cost*]."

The donor learns about gift options. Of course, options have prices. The prices justify talking about the planned gift amount. The prices can also lead to an increase in the gift. Now, there is a reason to give more.

Starting with a larger example gift can help. The donor's reactions will reveal details about the planned amount. If the price is too high, follow up with less costly options.

Defining victory after the current gift

This approach isn't limited to legacy fundraising. Cliff Wilkes explains,

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[6] Lumpkin, S. & Comfort, J. (2018, August 23). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. Colorado Planned Giving Roundtable, 30th Annual Summer Symposium, Denver, CO.

"If they have a current endowment or gift, I'll ask, 'what kind of impact do you ultimately want to have with your scholarship, endowment, etc.?'
This has,

- Opened the door to some meaningful conversations on ways to give,
- Led to larger gifts than what was originally discussed,
- Increased giving to current funds, and
- Led to several planned gifts."[7]

Helping the donor to define a meaningful victory is powerful. This is true *before* the gift decision. But it can also be true *after* the (initial) gift decision.

Victory implications: Increasing the benefit

Questions can uncover a meaningful victory. This makes for a compelling gift. But they can do even more. They can increase the importance of that victory. How? By asking questions about the victory's implications. For example,

- "What if this goal was accomplished? What would that mean to you?" *[This references values.]*

[7] Wilkes, C. (2020, May 2). Personal communication. Clifford Wilkes, Major Gift Officer, School of Medicine, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center

- "Why do you think this project is important to the community?"[8] *[This reference people.]*
- "You mentioned that your grandmother also cared about this cause. What would she have thought about this project?" *[This references people and life story.]*

The questions get the donor to describe the victory's results and meaning. They help the donor connect the results to his people, values, and life story. This highlights the *enhanced identity* benefits from donating.

Victory implications: Research

A meaningful victory delivers donor benefit. Implication questions can remind donors of these benefits. They can get the donor to confirm and restate them.

One experiment tested the effects of doing this.[9] It first asked some people about these personal benefits. It asked,

> "In your opinion, to what extent can making monetary donations give a sense of fulfillment and personal gratification? (1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much)"

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[8] Kihlstedt, A. (2009). *Capital campaigns: Strategies that work*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers. p. 61.

[9] Castiglioni, C., Lozza, E., van Dijk, E., & van Dijk, W. W. (2019). Two sides of the same coin? An investigation of the effects of frames on tax compliance and charitable giving. *Palgrave Communications, 5*(1), 1-10. See appendix for text of the phrases used.

It then asked,

> "According to some, making charitable donations can give a sense of fulfillment and personal gratification. Several reasons can be found for this feeling: being aware of providing for the community, having a clear conscience, being on the right side, doing a good deed, resting peacefully, not feeling guilty, etc.
> In your opinion, what are the three main reasons people could be fulfilled when making donations?"

These questions worked. Asking them increased willingness to donate. The questions highlighted positive implications from giving. This increases giving.

Conclusion

The universal hero story begins in the main character's original, small world. This is the source of his original identity. He is then faced with a call to adventure. It promises the hope of a victory. He eventually accepts the challenge and wins the victory. He returns as a transformed (internal) and honored (external) hero.

Original Identity → Challenge → Victory → Enhanced Identity

Powerful fundraising includes the same elements. The compelling fundraising challenge links back to the donor's original identity. It promises the hope of a personally meaningful victory. It moves the donor through the hero's journey.

Questions can help. They can help connect the challenge to the donor's original identity. They can help uncover a personally meaningful victory. They can highlight the enhanced identity resulting from the victory. They can advance the donor's hero story.

6

SOCRATIC FUNDRAISING SETTING: IS THIS THE LAND OF WEALTH SHARING?

The “one big thing” in fundraising is always the same: Advance the donor’s hero story. That’s the right story. But for major gifts, we need one more element. We need the right setting.

Major gift setting: Is this the land of wealth sharing?

In a story, setting matters. Setting creates expectations. It defines appropriate behaviors. Are we in a fantasy realm? Then we’re open to fantasy events. Are we in the Old West? Then we expect Old West things. The story should match the setting. A John Grisham legal thriller won’t include zombies. A Zane Grey western won’t have a magical elf.

In fundraising, setting matters. Typical gifts come from disposable income. They’re in the category of regular daily or weekly expenditures. This is a small reference point. This creates small comparisons and small gifts. A story in that setting will never lead to a major gift. A major gift doesn't fit the setting. It's like a space alien landing in a Danielle Steele romance.

Major gifts are different. Of course, they're larger. But they're also different in type. Major gifts are not gifts from disposable income. Major gifts are gifts of wealth. To advance a major gift story, we need the right setting. We need to be in the right world. We need to answer the question, "Is this the land of wealth sharing?"

Establish the setting

The major gifts story is set in the land of wealth sharing. How can a fundraiser establish that setting? It starts by talking about wealth. But this is Socratic fundraising. So, this means getting *donors* to talk about *their* wealth. It means getting them to talk about their businesses or investments.

How does talking help? First, just reminding people of their wealth is powerful.[1] This, by itself, encourages sharing. Second, it can reveal capacity. It can uncover assets. Third, it can reveal plans. It can show plans to buy or sell, acquire, or retire.

These assets and plans create opportunities. The fundraiser can share stories of what others like

[1] Morewedge, C. K., Holtzman, L., & Epley, N. (2007). Unfixed resources: Perceived costs, consumption, and the accessible account effect. *Journal of Consumer Research, 34*(4), 459-467.

the donor have done before. She can provide creative solutions. She can deliver value.

The fundraiser archetype

In the universal hero story, a guiding sage helps the hero. The sage gives advice, planning, and guidance. The sage introduces the hero to friends and allies. The sage provides a magical instrument or weapon. These help the hero complete the journey.

The effective fundraiser can be the guiding sage for the donor's hero story. She knows wise friends and allies. (She knows technical experts. She knows donors who have made complex gifts before.) She has "magical" instruments that can help with the journey. (She knows about gift instruments and agreements.)

But not every instrument works for every journey. Not every ally is helpful for every hero. Socratic inquiry reveals what fits each hero's specific journey. The guiding sage asks questions in order to help. Major gifts are set in the land of wealth sharing. For major gifts, the guiding-sage fundraiser should ask about assets.

But it's uncomfortable!

These conversations require talking about wealth. But many fundraisers are uncomfortable with this. They aren't wealthy themselves. Often, they aren't wealth experts. So, the topic can feel a little scary.

How can you overcome this? First, think of the goal as social, not financial. Suppose your job was to build relationships at a Star Trek convention. How would you prepare? You might want to learn a little about Star Trek. Why? Because it's what the other person cares about. It makes conversations easier.

Wealthy people are interested in wealth. Building and managing wealth is a big part of their lives. You might want to learn a little about the topic. Why? Because it's what the other person cares about.

Maybe you think tax law sounds like Klingon. But you can still learn a little.[2] You don't have to become a leading expert. The point is just to make conversations easier.

The right destination: A request to share options

Fundraisers may fear financial conversations. What if you say the wrong thing? What if you give bad advice? A conversation can feel like a scary pop quiz! These worries come from an underlying error. They come from having the wrong *destination* in mind.

We want to ask wealth and asset questions. We want to have wealth and asset conversations. We want to spot solutions where some option might be helpful. But the goal is *not* to quickly give the right

[2] For 65 free animated videos on charitable gift planning, see http://bit.ly/TexasTechProfessor

answer. The goal is this. Get permission to share options at *the next* meeting.

Phrasing the request to share options

It might sound like this:

"You remind me of another donor.[3] He was in a similar situation. I remember he[4] used some creative planning. It avoided taxes and helped him make a big impact.[5] Would you mind[6] if I put together some ideas for you to look at?"

This phrasing can be powerful.

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[3] The goal is to communicate that "people like me do things like this." "You remind me of" implies that this is a story of a person who is like your listener. If you have a particular donor example in mind and can think of a way in which this person is like the example, then point this out. For example, this might be a second sentence such as:
"He was in your same line of business." "He graduated about the same time you did." "He was about your age." These are all forms of attempting to connect the listener's identity to the forthcoming challenge.
For experimental results showing the importance of age matching in examples of other donations in a complex giving scenario see James, R. N., III. (2019). Using donor images in marketing complex charitable financial planning instruments: An experimental test with charitable gift annuities. *Journal of Personal Finance, 18*(1), 65-73.

[4] Gender match the pronoun here if possible. If gender matching isn't possible, try to avoid a gender reference. Again, the idea is to communicate that the story is about a person *like* the donor. For experimental results showing the importance of gender matching pronouns in fundraising see Shang, J., Reed, A., & Croson, R. (2008). Identity congruency effects on donations. *Journal of Marketing Research, 45*(3), 351-361.

[5] The goal here is to lead with benefit. For experimental results showing that people are more interested in learning more about a gift of assets when the phrase "avoid taxes" is part of the description see, James, R. N., III. (2018). Creating understanding and interest in charitable financial and estate planning: An experimental test of introductory phrases. *Journal of Personal Finance, 17*(2), 9-21.

[6] This sets the desired response as being a "No." People tend to feel safer when responding with a "No," as it is usually the less risky, status quo response.

- It shows that people *like the donor* have done things like this before. ("You remind me of," "similar situation")
- It leads with value. ("creative planning," "avoiding taxes," "big impact")
- It asks for permission to share more value. ("put together some ideas")
- It asks in a way where the desired answer is "no." Saying "no" feels safer. It's usually the less risky, status quo response. ("Would you mind if I")

Introducing the ally

If the fundraiser isn't comfortable presenting a proposal, that's OK. The guiding-sage fundraiser introduces the donor hero to a friend and ally. This ally helps advance the donor's journey. One fundraiser shares this phrasing,

> "I can't tell you the ins and outs of a CRUT, but I would be happy to introduce you to someone who can. I've been told that this instrument offers ways to maximize your giving, minimize income taxes, and provide a degree of flexibility in your financial situation. Is this something you'd be interested in?"[7]

Others suggest,

[7] Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. p. 165.

> "You mentioned that you are going to pass the business to your kids. Did you know there are some ways you can do that that will actually save you money on the transaction by being charitable? On my next visit, I'll bring our specialist in that area so we can talk about it in more detail."[8]

In either case, the goal is not to be quick with a solution. The goal is to spot an issue and get the next meeting. Only then does the fundraiser (or an ally) present valuable options.

The power of delay

The right destination is to get the *next* meeting.

Creating this time delay is important. It keeps the initial conversation social. It separates the conversation from any financial ask. It gives time to build creative options. It makes those options *feel* more valuable. An "off the cuff" answer is more easily dismissed, even if it's right.

This delay also gives the donor time to think. The donor knows the meeting will show asset giving options. This moves the donor's mindset into the land of wealth sharing. The more time the donor spends in this setting, the more likely a major gift becomes.

In story terms, the goal is to create an epic scene. The guiding sage delivers the perfect weapon.

[8] Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book*. CharityChannel Press. p. 91.

The weapon gives the hero confidence to take the journey. A great scene requires some build up. It requires some anticipation. In practical terms, it requires *the next* meeting.

The partial reveal

Having expertise can help. As knowledge increases, the ability to spot issues also increases. But expertise can also hurt. Instantly give the whole answer short circuits the process. Delay is valuable.

If we know the solution, a "partial reveal" is fine. It can create interest and attraction. (This is also true in seduction. A "partial reveal" works better than just walking around naked!) But make clear there is more to the story. If pressed, try to defer. For example,

> "I want to talk with some of my technical folks first. That way you'll get all the best options. But I know there are some attractive possibilities here."

Having the right destination changes things. It reduces fundraiser stress. It gives time to consult experts and build solutions. With this goal, even "failures" can be valuable.

Failing forward

Suppose we make an error. We think we spot an issue. We think we see an opportunity. But we later find there isn't a solution. If we get the next meeting, we can still win. We can still present other powerful options to the donor.

Suppose we present options, and the donor says, "No." This "failed" meeting can still lead to great success. We've shared useful options. We've provided value to the donor as a guiding sage. We've established our role in the donor's story. The donor may say, "No." The hero may at first reject the call to adventure. That's OK. That's part of the story. But in the hero story, and in life, things change.

Setting is a place and a time

Setting is a place. For the major gift, that place is the land of wealth sharing. But setting is also a time. The time for wealth sharing may not be today. It may be when an investment or business is about to be sold. It may be at the end of life. It may be when a new project arises at the charity.

The road to a major gift is often long. Major donors tend to plan their finances well in advance.[9] But asking about gifts of assets lays the groundwork. It prevents lost opportunities. (After a sale, many options are lost forever.) It prepares for moments of windfall gains when generosity is easiest.[10] It

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[9] Liu, Z., James, R. N., III, & Aboohamidi, A. (2020). Finding the next major donor: The relationship between financial planning horizon and charitable giving. *Journal of Personal Finance, 19*(2), 47-64.

[10] Arkes, H. R., Joyner, C. A., Pezzo, M. V., Nash, J. G., Siegel-Jacobs, K., & Stone, E. (1994). The psychology of windfall gains. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 59*(3), 331-347; Konow, J. (2010). Mixed feelings: Theories of and evidence on giving. *Journal of Public Economics, 94*(3-4), 279-297; Li, H., Liang, J., Xu, H., & Liu, Y. (2019). Does windfall money

prepares for life events that trigger estate planning.[11] It keeps the donor thinking of assets as *donation relevant*.

Maybe we didn't get the gift today. But the donor learned about new options. He saw what others like him have done before. He started a journey – a journey in a new land. He spent time in the land of wealth sharing.

Let's get started

We know the destination. We know the reasons why. But how do we get there? How do we even get started? What are the words and phrases? The next chapter looks at this.

encourage charitable giving? An experimental study. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 30*(4), 841-848; Reinstein, D., & Riener, G. (2012). Decomposing desert and tangibility effects in a charitable giving experiment. *Experimental Economics, 15*(1), 229–240.

[11] James, R. N., III. III. (2020). The emerging potential of longitudinal empirical research in estate planning: Examples from charitable bequests. *UC Davis Law Review, 53*, 2397-2431.

7

Socratic Fundraising Wealth Scripts: Questions That Lead to Gifts of Assets

Let's talk about wealth

We want the donor to talk about assets. Why? Because

1. It creates a setting of wealth sharing.
2. It uncovers capacity for a major gift.
3. It reveals opportunities for creative solutions. For example, a donor
   - Is planning to sell an appreciated asset[1]
   - Is *not* planning to sell appreciated stocks[2]

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[1] Selling appreciated assets means paying taxes. Any part that is donated before the sale avoids those taxes. Complex plans allow a sale with no taxes where the donor keeps the right to payments from the asset. For details of all of the options listed here see James, R. N., III. (2020). *Visual planned giving: An introduction to the law and taxation of charitable gift planning*. http://www.encouragegenerosity.com/VPG.pdf

[2] The donor can get tax benefits without changing the portfolio. They donate the old (appreciated) shares. They instantly purchase identical replacement shares. The portfolio doesn't change. But the taxable gain disappears.

- Is getting ready to retire[3]
- Is taking retirement account distributions[4]
- Has a big income spike[5]
- Can't use tax deductions[6]
- Has kids who don't want to take over the farm or a vacation home[7]
- Has estate tax issues[8]
- Has wealth tied up in illiquid assets[9]

4. It leads to the next meeting that shares these creative options.

Major gifts are gifts of wealth, not disposable income. To encourage these gifts, we need to have

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[3] A charitable remainder trust or charitable gift annuity can provide lifetime income and tax benefits.
[4] A "qualified charitable distribution" can address this issue.
[5] Special instruments can "pull forward" deductions for gifts that will not be paid out to the charity until future years such as the donor advised fund, retained life estate deed for homes or farmland, grantor charitable lead trust, or charitable remainder trust.
[6] Some tax advantages don't require using deductions. Avoiding capital gains taxes and reducing "required minimum distributions" from retirement accounts fit into this category. On the other hand, if the donor is itemizing but is over the income limitations due to past giving and can't use additional deductions, he can place an income producing asset into a non-grantor charitable lead trust which is it's own tax paying entity that can use the deductions up to 100% of income.
[7] A retained life estate deed can create an immediate income tax deduction when irrevocably donating the inheritance rights to a personal residence or farmland to charity.
[8] Estate gifts to charity are tax deductible. Transfers to non-grantor charitable lead trusts can expand these benefits by allowing tax free transfers to heirs of any growth above the section 7520 interest rate.
[9] Illiquid assets may be excellent candidates for a "flip" or "net income makeup" charitable remainder unitrust as no sale is required for many years.

wealth conversations.[10] How do we do this? How do we talk about wealth? More importantly, how do we get *the donor* to talk about *their* wealth?

Strategies from research

For some, their wealth is a sensitive topic. How do we get people to open up about a sensitive topic? Research suggests two useful approaches.

1. Start social then follow up. (This says, "I'm interested in your story.")
2. Make questions part of another task. (This says, "I can help you" or "I need your help.")

Start social then follow up

Starting with simple, social language often works best. Social, emotional language encourages sharing. Formal, transactional language does not.[11]

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[10] A great example of the importance of this comes from Bidwell, D. & Magnuson, C. (2012, October). *How to pursue and accept the right real estate gifts*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA, p. 7. ("I'm skeptical about the whole real estate gift thing. We've received only three calls in the last two years." To which we often respond: "Have you given your alums/members/donors any reason to think that you are interested in receiving real estate gifts? Do you mention it on your website? Do you include it in your mailings? Do you highlight it at reunions?" Most often the answer to these questions is: "Well, no, not really." To which we respond: "They are not going to give you a call unless you give them some reason to call.")

[11] James, R. N., III. (2018). Describing complex charitable giving instruments: Experimental tests of technical finance terms and tax benefits. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership. 28*(4), 437-452. For other explorations *see* Roberts, J. A., & Roberts, C. R. (2012). Money matters: Does the symbolic presence of money affect charitable giving and attitudes among adolescents? *Young Consumers, 13*(4), 329-336; Vohs, K. D., Mead, N. L., & Goode, M. R. (2008). Merely activating the concept of money changes personal and interpersonal behavior. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 17*(3), 208-212.

Social phrasing also tends to elicit more information.[12] Researchers tested different methods of asking sensitive questions. They found that

> "People are more forthcoming when you ask questions in a casual way, rather than in a buttoned-up, official tone."[13]

A social conversation about the donor's wealth might start simple:

- "How's business?"
- "How's the market been treating you?"[14]

The magic comes from the follow-up questions. These show we care. We care about the things the other person cares about. Most wealthy people care about their wealth. They care about their business or investments. Showing a shared interest through follow-up questions helps build relationships.[15] It can

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[12] John, L. K., Acquisti, A., & Loewenstein, G. (2011). Strangers on a plane: Context-dependent willingness to divulge sensitive information. *Journal of Consumer Research, 37*(5), 858-873. In this experiment, identical sets of sensitive questions were given different website headers. The informal header ("How BAD Are U???" in red font and included a cartoon devil logo") worked better than a neutral header ("Survey of Student Behaviors") which worked better than a formal header ("Carnegie Mellon University Executive Council Survey on Ethical Behaviors").

[13] Brooks, A. W., & John, L. K. (2018). The surprising power of questions. *Harvard Business Review, 96*(3), 60-67.

[14] *See also* Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book.* CharityChannel Press. p. 90. ("What do you think the market is going to do in the next year?")

[15] Huang, K., Yeomans, M., Brooks, A. W., Minson, J., & Gino, F. (2017). It doesn't hurt to ask: Question-asking increases liking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 113*(3), 430-452, 430. *See also*, Yeomans, M., Brooks, A., Huang, K., Minson, J., & Gino, F. (2019). It helps to ask: The cumulative

also reveal opportunities where the fundraiser's expertise provides value.

Tell me a story: Past, present, and future

Assets have stories. Questions can lead the donor through their asset story. The asset story progress through

- Past (origins of the asset)
- Present (what's happening now)
- Future (future plans for the asset).

This progression helps the donor to talk about their assets. But it also leads to fundraising conversations. Suppose the future plan is to sell. Giving before the sale can create tax and even income benefits.[16] Suppose the future plan is never to sell. Charitable estate planning then becomes key.

A sequence of questions might include

- Past
  "What's the story of your business? How did you get started?"[17]

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benefits of asking follow-up questions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 117*(6), 1139-1144.

[16] Giving an appreciated asset prior to sale avoids capital gains taxes. Giving through a charitable remainder trust allows a sale without initial capital gains taxes while retaining the right to payments from the proceeds resulting in higher annual income. Purchasing a charitable gift annuity with appreciated assets delays the payment of capital gains taxes.

[17] All questions in this "Tell me a story: past, present, future" section (except for estate phrasing) are from Greg Sharkey. Sharkey, G. (2021, March 25). Personal communication. Greg Sharkey, Senior Philanthropy Advisor, The Nature Conservancy.

- Present
  "What are you proudest of?" "What are you most excited about at the current time?"
- Future
  "What are your future plans for your business?"
- Future sale / transition
  "What will that mean to you?" "Have you thought about using the sale or transition of your business as an opportunity to achieve some of your charitable goals in addition to financial goals?"
- Future estate transfer
  "Will your heirs continue running the business?" "I know there are some smart ways to avoid taxes for people like you who want to include a gift to charity in their plans. Have you ever considered that?"

The asset need not be a business. For example, the conversation might begin,

- "Are you a collector (art, stamps, coins, etc.)?" "What is the story? How did you get started?"
- "Do you invest in Real Estate?" "How did you get started?"
- "Where do you vacation?" "Do you own a home there?"
- "How has the market been treating you?" "What is your investment philosophy?" "What's the best investment you ever made? Tell me that story."

The questions advance the story from past to present to future. The punchline is the future. The future conversation can lead to questions about giving. This might include,

- "Have you considered making gifts with assets instead of cash?"
- "Most donors giving at your level use appreciated assets instead of cash because they get a double tax benefit. Have you ever considered giving in that way?"

"How?" questions

In Socratic fundraising, we often want to know the "Why?" We want to uncover connections to the donor's people, values, and history. But in the wealth conversation, we instead want to know the "How?" We might ask,

> "You've done so much for [this charity]. What allows you to be so generous?"

Dan Rice explains,

> "Usually, we stop at asking the donor what motivated them to make the gift. We want to ask a very different question: 'How were you able to make this wonderful gift?'"[18]

[18] Rice, D. (2009, October). *Asking for principal gifts – 5 approaches*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 2.

Such conversations can transition to a discussion of wealth and assets. For example, Jay Steenhuysen suggests,

1. "What makes it possible for you to make this generous cash gift?
2. Have you ever given something other than cash to a charitable organization?
3. Are you planning to sell something this year that is worth more than you paid for it?"[19]

Reverse questions

Another Socratic opening doesn't *start* with a question. It starts with a statement *that triggers* a question. For example, a common social question is "What do you do?" Suppose we answer,

- "I help people give weird assets to [charity]."[20]
- "I help donors give smarter."

The statement triggers a question.

- "What's the weirdest asset someone has given?"
- "How do you help donors give smarter?"

This gives permission for us to share a story. In the story, our advice helps someone *like* the donor.

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[19] Steenhuysen, J. (2015, October 23). *A future for gift planning.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning.
[20] Clontz, B. (2018, June 3). *Planned giving comedy hour*. [Presentation]. Life and Legacy Conference, Springfield, MA.

They benefit by giving an asset instead of cash.[21] The story establishes our credibility as a guiding sage. The story ends with a question about the donor's wealth. For example,

- "Have you ever made any unusual investments?"
- "Have you ever been hit with capital gains taxes?"

These questions open the wealth conversation. It continues through follow-up questions.

Follow-up questions

There are many ways to start a wealth conversation. But the real power comes from the follow-up questions. As the conversation continues, planning opportunities emerge. For example,

"Have you ever made any unusual investments?"

- Yes? Ask about it. "Has it gone up in value?" The capital gains taxes for collectibles are high. This makes charitable options more attractive.
- No? Ask about it. "So, do you like stocks or bonds or something else?"

"Have you ever been hit with capital gains taxes?"

[21] For an extended story example, see Book II from this series, *The Epic Fundraiser: Myth, Psychology, and the Universal Hero Story*, Chapter 9 "Introducing the epic fundraiser to the public: What's your job?"

- Yes? Ask about it. "That must mean you were good at investing! Tell me what happened!"
- No? Ask about it. "That's smart. It's good to avoid those as long as you can. Do you think that might be a problem in the future?"

Notice, a person can also signal they don't own any appreciated assets. This is useful information. Wealth is held in appreciated assets. It's not held in cash. It's not held in checking accounts.[22] Usually, those without appreciated assets aren't wealth holders. They aren't likely to be major gifts prospects. Learning this is helpful.

Many paths, one destination

The conversation can take many directions. But the goal is to spot opportunities. Appreciated assets are ideal. Income goals can be important. Estate planning concerns create opportunities. Tax issues are perfect openings.

All of these can emerge from the follow-up questions. They can all lead to the same destination: Asking for the meeting to share options. For example,

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[22] Less than 3% of household financial wealth (excluding real estate) is held in cash or checking accounts. For example, in 2018, $113,094.2 Billion in Total Assets were held by households and $1,375.9 Billion were held in checkable deposits and currency held by households. Thus, 1.2% of total financial wealth is held in "cash" by that definition. Adding money market fund shares adds another $1,701.4 Billion. Combined, this adds to 2.7% of household wealth. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. (2019, June 6). *Financial Accounts of the United States - Z.1,* https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/z1/20190606/html/b101h.htm

> "This reminds me of another donor's situation. I remember he used some creative planning that [avoided taxes/created income/provided for family] and made a big impact at the charity. Would you mind if I talk to some of our experts and put together a few ideas for you to look at?"

Make questions part of another task

Sometimes, we can be blunt. As an estate planning attorney, I ask blunt questions to clients. What real estate do you own? Who's on the title? What's it worth? Stocks? Bonds? Bank accounts? Any children? Any by a prior marriage?

The questions aren't clever. They aren't social or "story-fied." Yet, people answer them. If even a close friend asked the same questions, it probably wouldn't have a good outcome. But here, it works. Why? Because we are there to get a job done. The questions are secondary to the task.

Making questions secondary to a task works. It works especially well for sensitive information. In one experiment,[23] some people were asked directly,

> "Have you done this behavior?"

Others were instead given two sets of options:

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[23] John, L. K., Acquisti, A., & Loewenstein, G. (2011). Strangers on a plane: Context-dependent willingness to divulge sensitive information. *Journal of Consumer Research, 37*(5), 858-873, 860, Table 1.

> "If you have EVER done this behavior, how unethical do you think it was?"
>
> "If you have NEVER done this behavior, how unethical do you think it was?"

The "task" was collecting opinions about ethics. Admitting the behavior was secondary. In this "secondary" approach, people were almost twice as likely to admit

- Making a false insurance claim
- Cheating on a tax return, or
- Lying about income.

Fundraising tasks

In fundraising, we aren't trying to get people to admit improper acts. But we may want them to tell us about their assets. And for some, that's also sensitive information. But we can also make these issues secondary to another task.

The task may relate to a philanthropic barrier. These conversations can start with a question like,

> "What's holding you back from reaching your charitable goals?"[24]

Financial solutions might vary. They might include a multi-year pledge, an estate gift, or a

[24] Lydenberg, J. (2007, October 13). *Identifying planned gift donors.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Grapevine, Texas.

complex trust. But first, we want to get agreement on the task. This might come from a question like,

> "What if it was possible for you to make a gift and still accomplish your financial goals? Would you mind if I shared some of those options with you?"

Other tasks can also start such conversations. The first goal is still to get agreement on a task. For example,

- "You mentioned that you are going to be [passing the business on to your kids / selling your practice]. Would you be interested in charitable options that may save you money on your transaction?"[25]
- "You have been so generous to this cause in the past. Would you be interested in learning how to give more at a lower cost by using the best assets for the gift?"

After agreeing to a task, things change. Now, questions can be blunt.[26] For example,

- "How do you give? Through a company? A private foundation?"
- "Do you normally give appreciated assets?"

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[25] Shuba, J. J. (2020, October). *Navigating planned gift conversations with your donors.* [Paper presentation]. National Charitable Gift Planners Conference. p. 2.

[26] See examples in Sagrestano, Brian M. & Wahlers, Robert E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book.* CharityChannel Press. p. 91.

- "How is your business structured?"
- "Is it difficult to get profits out due to tax concerns?"
- "Do you have any life insurance policies you no longer need?"

The fundraiser becomes a helpful advisor for an important task. Information sharing then comes naturally.

Use a menu

Another approach asks for reactions to a menu of asset giving options. In conversation, this might sound like the following.

- "I help donors like you to give smarter. Usually this involves gifts of stocks, real estate, businesses, life insurance, or retirement accounts. The tax benefits can be much larger. Have you ever considered giving something other than cash?"
- "What's your favorite form of giving?" "Have you ever considered other types of gifts like … [menu]?"[27] "What options would you be interested in knowing more about?"

A survey, response card, or website might do the same. Donors could check (or click) to receive information. For example,

[27] Modified from Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. p. 164.

- How to save taxes with gifts of stocks or bonds
- Top tax tips for gifts of real estate
- Tax smart giving from a retirement account
- Giving smarter with closely held businesses
- How to avoid estate taxes with charitable planning

Requesting the information reveals the assets. It also creates opportunity for further conversations.

We can ask donor opinions in person or in a survey. First, we justify the questions. Maybe we need help with a problem. For example,

- "We've noticed that other charities receive more of their gifts from stocks, bonds, and real estate.[28] We're trying to figure out why."
- "We've recently seen a drop in people saying that they've included us in their will documents. We're trying to figure out why."

Next, we ask for permission.

"Would you mind if I ask a few questions about your thoughts on this?"

Then, we ask for opinions.

- "What's the likelihood you would ever consider making

[28] In the U.S., such information is publicly available online for all charities on IRS Form 990, Schedule M.

  - A gift of stocks or bonds?
  - A gift of real estate?
  - A gift in a will?
  - A gift of cryptocurrency, artwork, or oil rights?"

- "What have you heard about the extra tax benefits from donating assets instead of cash? What about leaving estate gifts from an IRA or 401K?"

Change the setting after the decision

The right setting for major gifts is the land of wealth sharing. Sometimes we can establish that setting shortly before a gift. Sometimes we establish it years before. But what if we're too late? Even then, there are options.

> Cherian Koshy shared this story.[29]
>
> "I had a donor on the phone. He said, 'I'm going to send you a check for $2,000.'
>
> I said 'Jim, is there any chance that you have stock that is worth $2,000?'

[29] Koshy, C. (2020, August 12). *Data dive 'Why cash is not king in fundraising'*. [Webinar recording]. Endowment Partners. Las Vegas, NV https://share.vidyard.com/watch/tvdptudNMESa1DhDayV2HZ?
This "charitable swap" approach might be particularly powerful in certain markets. One study found that when investors believe the stock market will be rising, they become less likely to donate stock. [Amin, K., & Harris, E. (2020). The effect of investor sentiment on nonprofit donations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1-24.] The charitable swap can sidestep this by emphasizing that the donor's portfolio doesn't change.

> He said, 'Yes, absolutely. But I don't want to sell that stock.'
>
> I said, 'Take the cash. Go buy that exact same stock. Then send us the old shares worth $2,000. Now you have stepped up basis. That highly appreciated stock now starts at zero for capital gains tax purposes. And you get a charitable deduction as well.'
>
> He asked, 'I can do that?'
>
> I said, 'Yeah.'
>
> The next day we received a stock gift … of $10,000 from the donor."

Maybe the donor mentions he has included a gift in a will. Johni Hays suggests this question:

> "If you plan to leave something to charity in your estate plan, could I share with you a way to make sure the best assets are used for the gift to minimize the loss in taxes?" [30]

Maybe a donor has already made a pledge. Appreciated assets are an ideal way to fulfill it.[31] This conversation can even be scheduled right after the commitment. For example,

> "I can't thank you enough for this tremendous commitment to our charity. When I come back

[30] Hayes, J. (2017, October). *IRA wins Oscar: Best tax performance in a deferred gift.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 43.
[31] Clark, M. (2020, October 7). Personal communication. Matthew Clark, Director of Planned Giving, West Virginia University.

> to finalize the details of how you want to allocate the gift, I'll bring a colleague who specializes in putting together gifts to maximize the tax benefits for you."[32]

Knowing v. doing

It is easy to understand the idea. We want donors to make gifts of wealth, not disposable income. This changes the setting. It changes the reference points. It transforms giving. But actually doing it? That can be daunting. Cherian Koshy explains,

> "You intervene in the process and actually stop and say, 'No, I don't want your cash.' I know that's scary folks. I get it. But this is what you need to do.... What this really means is being the donor's helper in this conversation."[33]

The gift or pledge was already secured. And we interrupt that process. That's not what salespeople do!

And that's the point. We reject the cash – to help the donor. We take on more administrative hassle – to help the donor. We provide guidance, wisdom, and counsel. We serve as the donor's guiding sage. We advance the donor's hero story. We guide them in a journey. But it's a journey set in the land of *wealth* sharing.

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[32] Sagrestano, B. M. & Wahlers, R. E. (2016). *Getting started in charitable gift planning: The resource book.* CharityChannel Press. p. 91.
[33] Koshy, C. (2020, August 12). *Data dive 'Why cash is not king in fundraising'.* [Webinar recording]. Endowment partners. Las Vegas, NV https://share.vidyard.com/watch/tvdptudNMESa1DhDayV2HZ?

8

ASKING TO ASK IN SOCRATIC FUNDRAISING: CAN I SHOW YOU SOME OPTIONS?

Before the ask, one step remains. Asking for permission to ask. The request is to present a challenge. This is the proposal for support.[1] Getting permission first is important. It puts the donor in control.[2] It sets the stage for the ask.

The phrasing should present this as the next natural step in the conversation. For example,

- "I'd like to work with a few others at [the charity] to put together some options that match what we've been discussing. I think you'll be interested. I'd love to get your

[1] An Nguyen calls this the "Pre-Request." It is "setting the stage for the request, i.e., asking permission to present a proposal for support." Nguyen, A. (2020, February 20). *Five steps to the big ask: How to prepare donors to receive a big gift request* [Website]. https://ccsfundraising.com/five-steps-to-the-big-ask-how-to-prepare-donors-to-receive-a-big-gift-request/

[2] Amy Eisenstein explains, "By skiing for permission, you give them control over the topic." Quoted in Verma, N. (2020, June 26). *Virtual solicitation: Best ways to make a fundraising ask to get a YES!* [Website]. https://callhub.io/fundraising-ask/

thoughts on what we come up with. Would you be open to that?"

- "I've been thinking about our past conversation, and I want to share with you in person some gift opportunities that are right in sync with what we have been discussing. How does next Tuesday work for you to meet?"[3] Or "Would you be open to that type of conversation?"[4]
- "Can we sit down in a month so that I can present a formal proposal of support that aligns with your passions for the school and what we talked about today?"[5]
- "I'd like to meet with you in the next week or so to continue our discussion on how you can make a real difference with the organization. I have a few ideas that I'd like to share with you in person."[6]

Providing value

This phrasing emphasizes value. These value words include,

- "Ideas"

[3] Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 103.
[4] Eisenstein, A. (2014). *Major gift fundraising for small shops: How to leverage your annual fund in only five hours per week*. CharityChannel Press. p. 69.
[5] Nguyen, A. (2020, February 20). *Five steps to the big ask: How to prepare donors to receive a big gift request.* https://ccsfundraising.com/five-steps-to-the-big-ask-how-to-prepare-donors-to-receive-a-big-gift-request/
[6] Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 103.

- "Gift opportunities"
- "Investment opportunities"
- "Conversation," and
- "Proposal."

The request is to present a proposal. But these are meaningful, valuable options. This isn't leading to just, "Can I have some money, please?" (That's an experience people prefer to avoid.)[7] Sharing personalized, thoughtful, detailed opportunities is different. It can provide real value.

In the donor's hero story, the proposal is the "call to adventure." This "monomyth" proposal will

- Review connections with the donor's *identity* (people, history, and values)
- Make a giving *challenge* that promises a visualizable *victory*, and
- Demonstrate how this *victory* will deliver meaning and honor.

This proposal is valuable. It presents a compelling option. It promises a meaningful victory.

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[7] *See,* Trachtman, H., Steinkruger, A., Wood, M., Wooster, A., Andreoni, J., Murphy, J. J., & Rao, J. M. (2015). Fair weather avoidance: unpacking the costs and benefits of "avoiding the ask". *Journal of the Economic Science Association, 1*(1), 8-14.; DellaVigna, S., List, J. A., & Malmendier, U. (2012). Testing for altruism and social pressure in charitable giving. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 127*(1), 1-56; Dana, J., Cain, D. M., & Dawes, R. M. (2006). What you don't know won't hurt me: Costly (but quiet) exit in dictator games. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 100*(2), 193-201.

It advances the hero's journey. Completing the hero's journey delivers an enhanced identity. It delivers meaning and honor.

Using "value" words for the proposal isn't just a trick. It can match the donor's actual experience. It can match the donor's story.

The power of delay

Asking for permission to ask does something else. It creates a scheduled delay. This delay accomplishes several things.

First, it allows more time for donors to think. The identity and meaningful victory questions are deep issues. More time can help. Larger financial decisions aren't just instant impulse choices. They can require more thought. More time can help.

In one experiment, people were asked to make either a small (<$1) or large ($100) donation.[8] Some were asked to first reflect on the decision during a 60-second delay. (Others could answer right away.) Adding the delay had no effect on the small gift decision. But it more than doubled willingness to make the large gift. Adding time for contemplation was critical for larger gift decisions.

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[8] Mrkva, K. (2017). Giving, fast and slow: Reflection increases costly (but not uncostly) charitable giving. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making, 30*(5), 1052-1065.

Another experiment showed this in a different way. Donation options were $5, $100, and an open-ended blank. Some had to respond quickly. Others had to reflect during a 60-second delay. The delay had no effect on the likelihood of giving. But it dramatically increased the share of people who made larger gifts.[9] Adding time for contemplation was critical for larger gift decisions.

A delay accomplishes something else. It separates the conversational questions from the ask. The financial request doesn't come right away. This preserves the social context of the initial conversations.

Finally, a delay can increase perceived value. Options that take time and effort to construct feel more valuable.

Scheduled delay

Introducing a delay can be powerful. But we don't want to just indefinitely postpone a decision. We want to schedule it. Time is still critical. Deadlines are still motivational. For example,

- "We've already received financial commitments from 100% of the board. But before launching our public campaign in three months, we need to work with our leading supporters like you.

[9] Ekström, M. (2021). The (un) compromise effect: How suggested alternatives can promote active choice. *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics, 90*, 101639. [Experiment 2].

Your decision will be critical in convincing others to join the campaign after we go public."

- "I'd like to share some ideas that you could consider before the end of the tax year."

The power of the preliminary "yes"

Asking for permission with a delay triggers another behavioral reaction. People tend to *predict* they will help. This prediction is *higher* than the actual help they would have given if asked immediately. This is no surprise. A prediction doesn't cost anything. And we all like to view ourselves positively.[10]

But here's where it gets weird. Once people make this prediction, they then *change* their future behavior to match their prediction. Getting people to first *predict* their actions increases helping. This happens in experiments with

- Blood donations[11]

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[10]"… people are generally more accurate in their predictions of what others will do than in their (morally rosier) predictions about what they themselves will do." Haidt, J. (2007). The new synthesis in moral psychology. *Science, 316* (5827), 998-1002.
"Researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that people on average tend to think they are more charitable, cooperative, considerate, fair, kind, loyal, and sincere than the typical person but less belligerent, deceitful, gullible, lazy, impolite, mean, and unethical---just to name a few." Epley, N., & Dunning, D. (2000). Feeling" holier than thou": are self-serving assessments produced by errors in self-or social prediction? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*(6), 861-875.
For the problems this causes in survey research, see Nederhof, A. J. (1985). Methods of coping with social desirability bias: A review. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 15*(3), 263-280.
[11] Godin, G., Germain, M., Conner, M., Delage, G., & Sheeran, P. (2014). Promoting the return of lapsed blood donors: A seven-arm randomized

- Volunteering[12]
- Voting[13]
- Recycling,[14] and
- Buying environmentally friendly products.[15]

This also happens in fundraising. It helps explain the power of feasibility studies. These ask people to *predict* their future giving. The initial prediction is not a commitment. It doesn't cost anything. It's just a conversation to help with planning. But the future prediction can then influence actual giving.

In one experiment,[16] some university alumni were called and asked questions, including

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controlled trial of the question–behavior effect. *Health Psychology, 33*(7), 646-655; Godin, G., Sheeran, P., Conner, M., & Germain, M. (2008). Asking questions changes behavior: Mere measurement effects on frequency of blood donation. *Health Psychology, 27*(2), 179-184.

[12] Sherman, S. J. (1980). On the self-erasing nature of errors of prediction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39*(2), 211-221; Spangenberg, E. R., Sprott, D. E., Grohmann, B., & Smith, R. J. (2003). Mass-communicated prediction requests: Practical application and a cognitive dissonance explanation for self-prophecy. *Journal of Marketing, 67*(3), 47-62.

[13] Greenwald, A. G., Carnot, C. G., Beach, R., & Young, B. (1987). Increasing voting behavior by asking people if they expect to vote. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 72*(2), 315-318.

[14] Sprott, D. E., Spangenberg, E. R., & Perkins, A. W. (1999). Two more self-prophecy experiments. In E. J. Arnould & L. M. Scott (Eds.), *NA - Advances in Consumer Research: Vol. 26* (pp. 621-626). Association for Consumer Research.

[15] Bodur, H. O., Duval, K. M., & Grohmann, B. (2015). Will you purchase environmentally friendly products? Using prediction requests to increase choice of sustainable products. *Journal of Business Ethics, 129*(1), 59-75.

[16] Obermiller, C., & Spangenberg, E. (2000). Improving telephone fundraising by use of self-prophecy. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 5*(4), 365-372.

"If you were contacted by your high school or college and asked to donate money, would you do so?"

Others were asked only unrelated questions or no questions at all. A few days later, the university's fundraising phone campaign contacted everyone. Among those who were *not* asked to predict their giving, less than a third gave. Among those who were asked for a prediction, half gave. And, on average, they donated 70% more than those who weren't asked for a prediction.

Getting permission to make the ask does the same thing. It makes the donor consider what they might do in the future. They consider this prior to an actual commitment. When they're later asked to actually give, the gift becomes more likely. And it becomes larger.

Major gifts require time

We don't have to ask for permission. We could just ask for the gift. If the request is minor, there's no need to wait. People will make these small "social compliance" gifts if asked. But they also tend to avoid these requests.[17] The donor might disappear. If we're

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[17] *See,* Dana, J., Cain, D. M., & Dawes, R. M. (2006). What you don't know won't hurt me: Costly (but quiet) exit in dictator games. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 100*(2), 193-201; DellaVigna, S., List, J. A., & Malmendier, U. (2012). Testing for altruism and social pressure in charitable giving. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 127*(1), 1-56; Trachtman, H., Steinkruger, A., Wood, M., Wooster, A., Andreoni, J., Murphy, J. J., & Rao, J. M. (2015). Fair weather avoidance: unpacking the costs and benefits of "avoiding the ask". *Journal of the Economic Science Association, 1*(1), 8-14

asking small, we should do it now. We might not get another chance!

But that's not how major gifts work. Major gifts are not an impulse purchase.[18] Major gifts require thought. They require planning. They require time. One fundraiser shares,

> "If someone doesn't need to stop and think, it's not REALLY a major gift."[19]

Jerold Panas adds,

> "The chances are almost certain you won't receive a meaningful answer or a consequential gift on the first visit. If you do, odds are you could have gotten more!"[20]

Naomi Levine shares,

> "The quicker you ask, the less money you will receive."[21]

How long is the process for a major gift? Experienced fundraisers typically say about one to three years.[22] This will include four to six meetings or "moves."

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[18] Axelrad, C. (2019, April 23). *How not to ask for a major gift* [Blog]. NonprofitPRO. https://www.nonprofitpro.com/post/how-not-to-ask-for-a-major-gift/

[19] Philanthropy works (N.D.) *How long for a major gift?* [Website]. https://www.philanthropyworks.org/how-long-major-gift

[20] Panas, J. (2014). *Megagifts: Who gives them, Who gets them?* (2nd ed.). p. 91.

[21] Levine, N. B. (2019). *From bankruptcy to billions: Fundraising the Naomi Levine way*. Independently published. p. 47.

[22] Philanthropy works (N.D.) *How long for a major gift?* [Website]. https://www.philanthropyworks.org/how-long-major-gift

Time for story

But just waiting for time to pass won't lead to a major gift. Meetings and donor experiences can help. But they must *advance* the story. These "moves" must *lead to* a compelling fundraising challenge.

They can connect the organization, cause, or project with the donor's history, people, or values. They can demonstrate the organization's ability to deliver impact, meaning, and recognition. They can support the full donor-hero story process.

Original Identity → Challenge → Victory → Enhanced Identity

Fundraisers often describe the process in terms of building "trust" or "relationship."[23] A compelling challenge does require trust. Many organizations *promise* a victory. But few actually *deliver* that experience to the donor. Fewer still deliver a donor experience that enhances meaning or reputation.

A guiding sage can help in the donor's journey. But there is always a risk that the guide is a counterfeit. She may abandon the donor before the hero's journey is complete. She may simply be a jester who quits at the punchline. Relationship can increase trust against such donor abandonment.

[23] *Id.*

Next step

Trust, relationship, and permission are valuable. But these alone won't create a major gift. They simply support the "ask."

In a narrative arc, the ask is the "inciting incident." In the hero's journey, it's the "call to adventure." This is the critical story point where the main character must choose. It's the point in the donor's hero story that we'll look at next.

9

SOCRATIC FUNDRAISING'S "CALL TO ADVENTURE": MAKING A COMPELLING ASK

Making the ask can be the scariest part of fundraising. Setting up social events is great fun. Being friendly with others is enjoyable. Talking about their interests is comfortable. But asking for money? That's hard! Many fail simply by avoiding this critical step.

So how do we do this? What are the magic words? Let's start at the beginning.

Theory

The "one big thing" in fundraising is always the same: Advance the donor's hero story. The universal hero story, called the monomyth, includes specific steps. The hero,

1. Begins in the ordinary world
2. Is faced with a challenge (the call to adventure)

3. Rejects then accepts the call and enters the new world
4. Undergoes ordeals and overcomes an enemy
5. Gains a reward or transformation
6. Returns to the place of beginning with a gift to improve that world

This hero story progresses through

Original Identity [1] → **Challenge** [2, 3, 4] → **Victory** [4, 5] → **Enhanced Identity** [5, 6]

In three words, the monomyth cycle is[1]

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← **Victory**

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[1] Campbell uses a three step circular illustration with this description,

> "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."

Campbell, J. (1949/2004). *The hero with a thousand faces* (commemorative ed.). Princeton University Press. p. 28.
I label these steps as follows:
The beginning point of "the world of common day" is "**original identity**."
"Venturing forth into a region of supernatural wonder" is "**challenge**."
"Fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won" is "**victory**."
"The hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" is "**enhanced identity**."
I apply this both to a scenario where the charitable gift serves only as the final step in the heroic life story and where the gift request itself constitutes the challenge that promises a victory delivering enhanced identity. In a conventional narrative arc, the steps of original identity, challenge, victory, and enhanced identity also serve as backstory, inciting incident, climax, and resolution, respectively.

The fundraising ask is the “call to adventure.” It presents the challenge. It’s the point where the prospective hero is given a choice. Stay in the ordinary, small, self-focused world. (Reject the challenge.) Or go on an adventure to make an impact on the larger world. (Accept the challenge.)

What is the secret to a compelling fundraising ask? It’s this. The challenge must be part of the full story cycle. It must link to the donor’s original identity. (This comes from the donor’s history, people, or values.) It must promise a victory. (This is a specific, visualizable impact from the gift.) The promised victory must enhance the donor’s identity. (Externally, this is public reputation. Internally, this is private meaning.)

The story cycle ask

Theory is nice. But let’s get practical. How do we ask for money?

The compelling ask must be part of the full story cycle. To confirm this, the ask should verify each link.

Challenge
[1]↗ ↘[3]
Identity ← Victory
[2]

The story cycle ask is as simple as 1-2-3.

[1] *Identity* → *Challenge* sentence

"You have ... [here describe a connection with the donor's identity]."

[2] *Victory → Identity* sentence
"You understand ... [here describe how the victory would be meaningful to the donor]."

[3] *Challenge → Victory* sentence
"Would you consider a gift of $______ to ... [here describe the promised victory]?"[2]

This might sound like,

- [1] "You have been a friend of this library for over twenty years." *Identity → Challenge*.

  [2] "You understand how a new regional history collection would preserve our shared heritage." *Victory → Identity*.

  [3] "Would you consider a gift of $50,000 to lead the campaign to make this a reality?" *Challenge → Victory*.

- [1] "You have done so much to improve care for others since your own diagnosis with breast cancer." *Identity → Challenge*.

  [2] "You understand more than anyone how lives can be changed by offering free early screening." *Victory → Identity*.

[2] Three sentences adapted from Collins, M. E. (2017, Winter). The Ask. *Advancing Philanthropy*, 16-23, p. 21. Quoting Marcy Heim. *See also,* Heim, M. (2018, August 22). *Wanna Do EVERYTHING Better?* [Website] http://marcyheim.com/wanna-do-everything-better

[3] "Would you consider a gift of $100,000 to help fund next year's screening clinics?" *Challenge → Victory*.

- [1] "You have always had such a heart for supporting the arts in our community." *Identity → Challenge*.

  [2] "You understand how this new exhibition could make a real impact for other art lovers like you and our whole city." *Victory → Identity*.

  [3] "Would you consider a gift of $50,000 as our lead campaign donor to make this happen?" *Challenge → Victory*.

- [1] "You have been such a loyal alumnus of this department since you graduated years ago." *Identity → Challenge*.

  [2] "You understand how important scholarships are in helping others like you become proud alums of the future." *Victory → Identity*.

  [3] "Would you consider a gift of $100,000 to fund a permanent named scholarship giving students the chance for an education?" *Challenge → Victory*.

Foolproof

Making this story cycle ask is foolproof. Why? Because we can't do it without the full story. It makes the missing pieces obvious.

Suppose we don't know how the donor's story or values connect to the challenge. Step 1 can't happen. Suppose the ask doesn't promise a specific impact. Step 3 can't happen. Suppose we don't know why the gift's impact would be meaningful for the donor. Step 2 is impossible.

We can't make this story cycle ask without each part. It's foolproof because it prevents a "foolish" ask. Of course, the stronger each step is, the more compelling the ask will be.

Wheel within a wheel

The hero's journey isn't a one-shot story. It's a continuing, repeated cycle. It arises again and again. Effective fundraising uses the identity-challenge-victory cycle. It uses this cycle again and again. Like a spiral or mandala, the circle starts wide. Gradually, it narrows. It gets smaller, clearer, and more precise.

The early stages reveal the broad strokes of the circle. Questions can uncover link 1: *Identity → Challenge*. For example,

- "Tell me about your connection to [this charity]."

- "How has [this cause] been important in your life?"
- "Have others in your life been affected by [this cause]?"

Questions can uncover link 2: *Victory → Identity*. For example,

- "What would you like to accomplish with your giving that would be meaningful to you?"
- "If the sky were the limit, what would you change at [this charity]?"

Each answer makes the story circle a little clearer. It helps the fundraiser pinpoint the compelling challenge. Gradually, the circle takes shape. Cultivation leads to solicitation. This can take place over days or months.

The ask is preceded by the proposal. The proposal walks through each step of the circle.

- It includes the donor's connections to the cause, the charity, or the project. ("Here is why you care.")
- It paints a clear picture of the victory. ("Here is the outcome.")
- It shows how the challenge leads to the promised victory. ("Here is what your gift will do.")

This circle is smaller. It takes less than an hour.

The ask is the final circle. It takes less than a minute. But it still has every element. It makes links 1, 2, and 3. It contains the entire story circle.

The guiding sage at the ask

An archetypal character in the hero's journey is the guiding sage. This wise guide helps the hero. She provides guidance, advice, and planning. She provides magical instruments to the hero. She introduces the hero to friends and allies. Often it is this guiding sage who presents the call to adventure. The sage challenges the hero with a heroic choice.

This is the role of the fundraiser. By embodying this primal role, the fundraiser can guide the donor. The nonprofit is the donor's magical instrument. The donor uses it to achieve a compelling victory. At the ask, the guiding sage challenges with a heroic choice.

But even at the ask, the fundraiser stays in character. The fundraiser is a guiding sage. The ask is not an argument. It's not a fight. The fundraiser provides guidance, advice, and planning. She comes *alongside* the donor.

Physical positioning at the ask

Even the fundraiser's physical position can match this role. Facing directly across a table is a traditional conflict or negotiation position. A 90-degree angle, such as across a table corner, softens this. The fundraiser can improve either angle by using a focus object. This can be the proposal document.

The focus object changes the positioning. It creates a triangle. Even if the fundraiser and donor are directly across from each other, they're both above the proposal. Focusing on the object shifts away from a parallel (conflict) position: II. It shifts to an angled (merging) position: V.

The fundraiser will walk through the proposal. She will turn the pages. She will mark on the proposal, circling and underlining. This places the fundraiser in the physical posture of advising. She is explaining. She is guiding.

The fundraiser should maintain control of the focus object. If the donor takes the proposal, the fundraiser loses control. The fundraiser loses the physical position of the guiding advisor. Now, the donor interacts only with the document. The triangle is broken. The fundraiser becomes an outsider. The donor can quickly flip through, merely glancing at the pages. He can skip to dollar ask, bereft of the full story. Bad things happen when the fundraiser loses the focus object before the ask.

In a less formal setting, a fundraiser might physically walk alongside a donor. She can point to where a project might take place. The focus object might be a room, a field, or a building.

There isn't just one magic position. There is instead a magic story. The story is the donor's hero story. Within that story, the fundraiser has a magic role. The fundraiser is the guiding sage. The effective fundraiser fills this role in every way possible.

Lead up to the ask

Many experiences leading up to the ask can make it more compelling. They do so by confirming each link in the cycle.

These lead-up steps can strengthen connections between the donor's identity and the challenge. This is link 1: *Identity→Challenge*. These lead-up steps can:

- Increase donor involvement with the charity's work and people.
- Express gratitude for and remind donors of their past support.
- Reference others like the donor who have made this commitment.

The lead-up steps can strengthen connections between the challenge and the victory. This is link 3: *Challenge→Victory*. They can:

- Demonstrate the donor's past impact.
- Make the next gift's impact clearer.

The lead-up steps can strengthen connections between the victory and an enhanced identity (public or private). This is link 2: *Challenge→Victory*. They can:

- Make the victory more visualizable and emotionally relevant.
- Reference others aligned with the donor who support the cause.
- Show how the victory matches the donor's life story and values.

The answer is story

The lead-up techniques can be almost limitless. But the strategy starts with story. It starts with plot and character. It allows the fundraiser to be the donor-hero's guiding sage. It advances the donor's hero story. It moves the donor through the cycle of identity, challenge, and victory.

A bad fundraising ask won't do this. It might violate the guiding sage's role. Or it might skip a link in the story. For example,

- It won't connect the donor's original identity to the challenge, or
- It won't make a heroic challenge, or
- It won't promise a victory, or
- It will promise a victory that doesn't enhance the donor's identity.

Powerful story makes powerful fundraising. The most powerful fundraising story is the donor's hero story. When the ask tells that story, the ask becomes powerful.

10

Socratic Fundraising After the Ask: Congratulations! You Got a "No."

Disaster!

We put in the work. We put in the planning. We carefully execute each step in the cultivation process. We thoughtfully craft and stage the fundraising ask. And, finally, we get the answer. And the answer is … "No."

What do we feel? Disappointment? Devastation? Self-doubt? This emotional experience is all too common for fundraisers. And it's bad. These bad emotions can lead to bad behaviors.

- It can make fundraisers avoid asking. ("Maybe I'll stay in the office today. Someone's got to choose the fonts for that new 'branding' effort.")
- When they do bring themselves to ask, it can make them ask small and safe. ("What amount would be easy for this donor?")

- Or it can make them callous. ("Cranking through enough 'no's' just gets me closer to the next 'yes.' I am a high-volume sales machine! Just keep asking! Always be closing!")

Flip the script

But what if the story was different? What if the "no" wasn't the end of the story? What if the "no" was an *essential part* of the story?

The universal hero story contains several core elements. The prospective hero always faces a "call to adventure." This call says,

> "Leave behind the small, self-focused, original world! Embark on a sacrificial journey to impact the larger world!"

And in that universal hero story, the answer to this call is always the same. It's always "no."

"No" is the perfect start

Wait. What? How can that be? If the hero says, "No," the story ends, right? Wrong. The hero eventually does accept the challenge. But this comes only later. First, the hero must reject the "call to adventure."

Why? The rejection shows that the "call to adventure" is a serious challenge. It's difficult. If the journey were easy, it wouldn't be heroic. The "no" is essential to the story. But so is what happens *after* the "no."

"No" is about what happens next

After the "no," the effect of a compelling, heroic challenge continues. The ordinary, self-focused world feels a bit less captivating by comparison. Sometimes the hero's circumstances change. Sometimes the guiding sage returns with a more compelling "call to adventure." Only *then* does the "no" become a "yes."

The hero's guiding sage might be impressive like Obi-Wan, Morpheus, or Gandalf. Still, the initial "call to adventure" is met with a "no." But the guiding sage does not disappear. The sage continues to play the role. The sage persists in advancing the hero's journey.

In the hero story, the "no" is not the end. It's just another step. Afterwards, the guiding sage's role continues. The story cycle continues.

That's fine for stories. But what does this look like in real-world fundraising?

Next steps in the real world

The donor says, "No." Or "Maybe." Or "I don't know." Now what?

The fundraiser's role doesn't change. The fundraiser is the donor-hero's guiding sage. She helps the donor along the hero's journey.

The fundraiser's goal doesn't change, either. The fundraiser advances the donor's hero story. She continues the story cycle.

The next steps continue the role and the story. So, they'll sound familiar. They'll sound like the previous steps. The donor says, "No." What's next?

We begin by resuming the guiding-sage role.

1. *Be silent*.
   Silence creates space for a donor to explain. It implies, "I am listening to you."
2. *Make a reflective statement*.
   This implies, "I hear you."
3. *Ask for permission*.
   Asking, "Can I ask you a question?" puts the donor in charge. Permission allows the fundraiser to resume the Socratic, guiding-sage role.

Next, we resume the story cycle.

4. *Affirm the story connections*.
   This continues the story. It connects *Identity → Challenge → Victory → Identity*. It shows why the donor wants to be part of this journey.
5. *Diagnose the story barrier*.
   What is keeping the donor from saying "yes"?
6. *Isolate the story barrier*.
   Confirm that this is the only barrier. This turns the "no" into a contingent "yes."

7. *Attack the story barrier*.
   Ask for permission to share some options. The options provide alternatives that address the barrier.

This isn't a fundraiser-donor conflict. It's not a dispute. It's appreciative inquiry. It's conversation. It's sharing ideas about an external obstacle standing in the way of the donor's hero story.

The guiding sage helps. She offers advice. She provides magical instruments. She helps the donor complete the hero's journey.

The actual conversation may skip steps or change the order. But the goal is the same. Resume the role and resume the story. Let's look at some example phrases for each step.

Part I: Resume the guiding-sage role

1. Be silent: "I am listening to you."

After the ask the fundraiser must be silent. Everyone knows that. But silence also helps after the negative response. A donor says, "No," or "I don't know." Don't immediately start talking. Don't fill the void. Just wait and listen. This silence can pull the donor to explain further. Remember, Socratic fundraising requires *the donor* to speak.

2. Make a reflective statement: "I hear you."

The donor has spoken. We want to show that we have heard. We do that with a statement that reflects what the donor has said. It shows agreement, or at least empathy. Remember, this is not a dispute. We're all on the same side.

The reflective statement is a transition. It can transition back to the ask. It can do this implicitly by going back to Step 1: Silence. It can do this explicitly by returning to make the ask again, this time with some added emphasis. Or, if the "no" is final, it can move forward to Step 3: Permission. These might sound like the following.

Suppose a donor says, "That's a lot of money!" or "Wow! I don't know." Returning to Step 1 means making a reflective statement and then … silence. The statement might be simply,

- "Yes, it is." Or,
- "I completely understand. This is a big consideration."[1]

Or we can make a reflective statement and then re-ask. This time the ask should add some new emphasis. For example,

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[1] Levine, J. & Selik, L. A. (2016). *Compelling conversations for fundraisers: Talk your way to success with donors and funders*. Chimayo Press. p. 93.

- "I know this is a big challenge. I wouldn't ask except we need a strong female leader for this project."[2]
- "I understand. Believe me, we don't ask for this every day. You are one of the very few people we can turn to and ask for this important gift."[3]
- "Perhaps they'll say, 'That's more than anyone is this community has ever given.' And you'll tell the truth, replying, 'That's true, but then, this is the most important, largest campaign in our community's history and a lot of people have given the largest gifts of their lives – I know I did.'"[4]

Each response begins with agreement. This resumes an advising role, not an arguing one. Agreeing that the request is large also matches the story. It highlights the heroic nature of the challenge.

Each response is followed by silence. The silence is powerful. It gets the donor to talk. Marc Pitman writes,

> "You might respond with a phrase like, 'I can appreciate that …' and let the silence fill the air.

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[2] Melvin, A. (2020, October 7-9). *Solicitation preparation: The keys to a successful ask.* [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference, online. p. 10.
[3] Fredricks, L. (2001). *Developing major gifts: turning small donors into big contributors.* Aspen Publishers, Inc. p. 116.
[4] Grover, S. R. (2006). *Capital campaigns: A guide for board members and others who aren't professional fundraisers but who will be the heroes who create a better community.* iUniverse. p. 105.

Watch what happens. Sometimes people just need to hear themselves explain why a gift is so important. It's hard to be quiet at times like this but it's crucial."[5]

Once the donor is done talking, we're ready to move to the next step. Once again, a reflective statement can start this transition. Socratic fundraising isn't just about asking. It's about asking, listening, and hearing. The reflective statement shows we've heard the donor.

3. *Ask for permission: "Can I ask you a question?"*

The next step justifies asking questions. It might sound like this:

- "I really appreciate you considering this. I want to learn a bit more about your feelings on this project. Do you mind if I ask you a question?"
- "Thanks for responding so clearly to my request. And I did hear what you said. I don't mean to press you on the matter ... but I feel I must ask you a question. Do bear with me ..."[6]

[5] Pitman, M. A. (2008). *Ask without fear! A simple guide to connecting donors with what matters to them most.* Tremendous Life Books. p. 43.

[6] Panas, J. (2007, March 1). *Fundraising's four magic questions: Answer these and the gift is yours.* Guidestar. [Blog]. https://trust.guidestar.org/fundraisings-four-magic-questions-answer-these-and-the-gift-is-yours

As with other steps, this can be skipped. But asking permission is powerful. It makes the donor feel in charge. It gets them used to saying, "Yes." It creates acceptance for the questions to follow.

Part II: Resume the story cycle

After the "no," we've resumed the Socratic role. We've listened. We've heard. We've justified asking questions.

Now it's time to resume the story cycle. The story is the donor's hero story. The hero story cycle progresses through[7]

Original Identity → Challenge → Victory → Enhanced Identity

Or simply,

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← Victory

We resume the story by reaffirming the story links.

4. Affirm the story connections

We begin the conversation with likely points of *agreement*. Our goal is to elicit the donor's confirmation of giving motivations. We are coming

[7] For a description connecting these steps to Campbell, J. (1949/2004). *The hero with a thousand faces* (commemorative ed.). Princeton University Press. p. 28, *see* footnote 3 in Chapter 1. Socratic fundraising theory: How questions advance the story.

alongside the donor. We are here to help the donor accomplish something meaningful to him.

We might start by confirming the identity connections with the cause or organization. This supports the link of *Original Identity → Challenge*. It might sound like this:

> "You've been a supporter for so long and have done so much, I was certain you felt positive about our work and our vision. Do you still feel that same friendship and support?"[8]

We might confirm that the gift would make an impact. This supports the link of *Challenge → Victory*. For example,

> "Are you concerned that the organization wouldn't be effective at using this gift to make a difference in the lives of these students?"

We might confirm the meaningfulness of the gift's impact. This supports the link of *Victory → Enhanced Identity*. For example,

> "I remember the last time we met, you said that it was very important to you that ... [insert the "victory" the gift accomplishes]. Has that changed for you?"[9]

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[8] Panas, J. (2007, March 1). *Fundraising's four magic questions: Answer these and the gift is yours.* Guidestar. [Blog]. https://trust.guidestar.org/fundraisings-four-magic-questions-answer-these-and-the-gift-is-yours

[9] Wohlman, J. (2020). *Practice the ask and negotiation (part 3).* [Video transcript]. Major and principal gifts course. University of California, Davis. https://www.coursera.org/lecture/major-principal-gifts/practice-the-ask-and-negotiation-part-3-bxhL5

Ultimately, we will get to the objection. This may be the price, timing, project, organization, or something else. But first we want to "clarify" what the objection is *not*. This re-establishes the donor's motivation for the gift.

This also reframes the objection. The objection then becomes a barrier preventing the donor from accomplishing *his* goals. The goal might be

- "*Your* named scholarship fund," or
- "The joy *your* gift will bring these patients."[10]

The key idea is this. The goal is *the donor's* goal.

The questions re-affirm the donor's connections with the goal. They remind the donor why this goal is important *to him*. They remind him why this goal is part of *his story*.

5. Diagnose the story barrier

Next, we want to learn the details about the barrier. What's the issue? Is it the cause? The organization? The project? The amount? The timing? We ask questions to learn.

But even if we already know, we still ask. We ask because getting *the donor* to state the barrier

[10] Fredricks, L. (2001). *Developing major gifts: Turning small donors into big contributors.* Aspen Publishers, Inc. p. 121.

helps. It causes the donor to attach the "no" to the external issue. It's no longer the donor's "no." It's the obstacle's "no."

The guiding-sage fundraiser can then come alongside the donor to help. The two can work on this external problem together. As one fundraiser explains,

> "By turning the objection into an objective, you've put yourself on the same side of the table as the other person. Now you both are working together to figure out how to help the donor make the gift. You've taken a possibly challenging problem and made solving it a team effort."[11]

The questions can follow the familiar pattern. This starts with open-ended questions. These then lead to reflective statements and follow-up questions.

If the objection isn't known, the initial questions might sound like this:

- "Can you share with me the reason or reasons why this is not something you want to do?"[12]
- "Can you tell me more about why you don't think you can do this?"[13]

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[11] Pitman, M. A. (2008). *Ask without fear! A simple guide to connecting donors with what matters to them most.* Tremendous Life Books. p. 44.
[12] Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 211.
[13] *Id.*

- “What are your concerns?”[14]
- Or for a “Maybe” response, “What factors are you weighing?”[15]

Once the reason is known, ask for elaboration. For example,

- “You said you ‘didn’t think you could swing that much.’ Tell me more about that. Is this an issue of timing, other obligations, liquidity, or something else?”
- “You said you couldn’t do this ‘right now.’ By ‘right now,’ what time frame do you mean?”[16] Or, “When would be the appropriate time for us to begin discussing your next gift?”[17]
- “You mentioned this project just isn’t for you. “What area of work would you be interested in?”[18]

6. Isolate the story barrier

We get the donor to state the objection. We ask for elaboration. We make a reflective statement. Then we request confirmation that we got it right.

[14] Collins, M. E. (2017, Winter). The Ask. *Advancing Philanthropy*, 16-23, p. 22.
[15] *Id.*
[16] Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 212.
[17] Stroman, M. K. (2014). *Asking about asking: Mastering the art of conversational fundraising* (2nd ed.). CharityChannel Press. p. 244.
[18] Managementcentre. (2016, March 11). *7 Steps of Solicitation* [Website]. managementcentre.co.uk/fundraising/7-steps-of-solicitation/

But here's the secret. We want a special kind of confirmation. We want a confirmation that this is the *only* barrier. This confirmation is powerful. It turns the "no" into a *contingent* "yes." For example,

- "It sounds like you would like to invest in our school, but right now you can't see how you might do it. Am I right about that?"[19]
- Donor: "I need to talk with my accountant. He's not going to like it." You: "What is important here today is that you would like this gift to happen.[20] If you want it to happen, we can work on the other issues together."
- Donor: "I don't think I can swing it." You: "Maybe not, but I think you want to swing it. Am I right?"[21]
- [In response to a delaying or hyper-technical question] "That is another great question. Let me ask you, if I can answer this to your satisfaction, is this the last thing standing in the way of your making the gift?"[22]

[19] Wohlman, J. (2020). *Practice the ask and negotiation (part 3).* [Video transcript]. Major and principal gifts course. University of California, Davis. https://www.coursera.org/lecture/major-principal-gifts/practice-the-ask-and-negotiation-part-3-bxhL5
[20] Fredricks, L. (2001). *Developing major gifts: Turning small donors into big contributors.* Aspen Publishers, Inc. p. 117.
[21] Melvin, A. (2020, October 7-9). *Solicitation preparation: The keys to a successful ask.* [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference, online, p. 10.
[22] Baker, B., Bullock, K., Gifford, G. L., Grow, P., Jacobwith, L. L., Pitman, M. A., Truhlar, S., & Rees, S. (2013). *The essential fundraising handbook for small nonprofits.* The Nonprofit Academy. p. 250.

7. *Attack the story barrier*

The barrier to the donor's hero story has been defined. Now it's time for the guiding sage to come alongside the donor to help attack that barrier. The guiding sage brings forth advice, wisdom, and magical instruments. The sage helps the hero complete the journey.

Obi-Wan gives Luke a light saber. Gandalf shows Bilbo where to find the ring. Morpheus teaches Neo "kung fu." Dumbledore gives Harry Potter the invisibility cloak. The guiding-sage fundraiser comes alongside the donor to help solve the problem.

This could be a quick solution. Suppose the amount is too much. We respond by breaking the gift into a multi-year pledge. For example,

- "We're not asking for a gift right now, just a pledge. As long as you can start your payments within the next three years, a pledge is just as good as a gift."[23]
- If the person says, 'I already have a pretty large commitment to the symphony to pay for,' you can say, 'I understand. Let me remind you that you will have a three-to-five-year window to pay off this gift.'"[24]

[23] Grover, S. R. (2006). *Capital campaigns: A guide for board members and others who aren't professional fundraisers but who will be the heroes who create a better community.* iUniverse. p. 105.
[24] Collins, M. E. (2017, Winter). The Ask. Advancing Philanthropy, 16-23, p. 22.

- They say: “$25K is too much. You say: “How about that over five years? $5K per year?”[25]
- “We’re not asking that you write a check today. Our pledge period goes up to four years, so it would be $125,000 each year.”[26]

Sometimes the quick solution doesn’t work. Then the guiding sage moves to more complex options. Here, the goal changes. It’s no longer to get agreement to make a gift. Instead, the goal is to gain enough interest in a potential solution to get the next meeting. The next meeting presents the complex solutions.

This can follow the “feel, felt, found” pattern.[27] It ends with the request to present detailed options.

1. I understand how you feel. *[This is a reflective statement.]*
2. Others like you have felt that way. *[This begins a social norm.]*
3. Here is what they have found that worked. *[This presents a solution idea with a social norm.]*

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[25] Melvin, A. (2020, October 7-9). *Solicitation preparation: The keys to a successful ask.* [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference, online, p. 11.
[26] Grover, S. R. (2006). *Capital campaigns: A guide for board members and others who aren't professional fundraisers but who will be the heroes who create a better community.* iUniverse. p. 105.
[27] Ciconte, B. L. & Jacob, J. G. (2009). *Fundraising basics: A complete guide*. Jones & Bartlett Learning. p. 168.

In a conversation, the pattern might sound like this.

DONOR: [Not much excitement about this leadership or organization.]

YOU: I understand how you feel. Others who have felt the same way have decided to put specific instructions with their gift. That way they know exactly what their money is accomplishing. Would a permanent endowment funding the domestic violence outreach be of more interest to you?

DONOR: I would love to do this, but I'm on a fixed income. (Or I'm saving for retirement.)

YOU: I understand how you feel. Many of our donors have felt the same way. They have found that they can make a gift that pays them income for life. Or they can add a gift in a will that costs them nothing today. What are your thoughts about that?

DONOR: All my assets are tied up right now. The cash just isn't available.

YOU: I understand. We work with many donors like you in this same position. It's actually the perfect situation. The tax benefits are much better if you give *before* you've sold the asset. Would you mind if I put together some options for you? I think you might be surprised at what the numbers look like.

DONOR: I would make an estate gift, but all my planning is done. I don't want to have to go through that again!

YOU: I understand. Many of our donors feel the same way. But they've found that the smartest way to make the gift isn't by changing their will or trust documents. They just add the charity as a beneficiary to an IRA or 401(k). Anyone else who inherits that money pays income taxes on it. But not the charity. Would you mind if I showed you how easy it is to do this?

DONOR: [Not much excitement about this project.]

YOU: I understand how you feel. Others have felt the same way. They've found that other projects are a better fit for them. Do you mind if I share some of those? You might find one that really appeals to you.

The more solutions the fundraiser knows, the more likely she can continue the conversation. But the goal isn't always to give a quick solution. It can be enough to reference that there are some possible solutions. This is followed by a request. The request is for permission to share more detailed options. It might sound like this:

> "If you wouldn't mind visiting again, I'd like to work with some experts and put together a few personalized options for you. There's no

> obligation, but I think you'll find some of them really interesting. Would your calendar allow us to meet on Tuesday the 15th at this same time?"

Agreement for the next meeting gives the donor more time to think. It gives the fundraiser more time to plan. It also justifies asking detailed questions to help build the specific proposal.

Why not just concede?

Among all these steps and strategies, one approach is missing. Don't start by conceding. As Laura Fredricks advises, if a donor objects to the amount,

> "First and foremost, please do not say, 'What did you have in mind?'"[28]

Why not? Admittedly, the donor's decision is the donor's decision. If he decides to give $1,000 instead of $10,000, then that's what he'll do. But the role of the guiding-sage fundraiser is to help the donor accomplish a *heroic* victory. It's not to just settle for the comfortable "pat on the head" gift. Those gifts are fine. But they aren't heroic.

If the donor isn't interested in the stretch gift, then something is missing. The fundraiser's role is to find out what that is. What's the barrier? Is it the project, the charity, the timing, the amount? We want

[28] Fredricks, L. (2006). *The ask: How to ask anyone for any amount for any purpose*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 213.

to work on it together. We want to overcome that barrier.

The immediate response is not to give up the victory. It's not to happily trade the hero's journey for a convenient "go away" gift. Why shouldn't we simply concede? Because that's not the role we're playing. That's not the story we're advancing.

Notice the heroic themes in Laura Fredricks's response to the "no,"

> "[state] right up front that yes, this is a very large amount asked, something not done every day ... The next response, "You are one of the few people we can turn to ask for this important gift," will bolster your original statement and will let the prospect know that the organization views him or her as a treasured and model donor."[29]

Of course, the proposed gift might not be possible. Even with all the guiding sage's magical instruments, the gift might be simply beyond the donor's capacity. That's OK. But we want to get to that place at the end of this process, not at the beginning. And what happens then?

The hard "no"

Even with a hard "no," the goal doesn't change. The goal is still to advance the donor-hero's journey.

[29] Fredricks, L. (2001). *Developing major gifts: Turning small donors into big contributors.* Aspen Publishers, Inc. pp. 116-117.

The goal is still for the donor to make a heroic gift. And because of the Socratic process, we know more.

We know more about the story connections. We know more about the story barriers. This can lead to crafting a better challenge for this donor. Or it can lead to leaving the challenge for a future day.

Not every “no” can be quickly flipped to a “yes.” But the truly heroic challenge is still compelling. If it fits with the donor’s identity, it’s compelling. If it promises a meaningful victory, it’s compelling.

Even after the “no,” this heroic challenge can continue to influence the donor. In the monomyth, the hero refuses the first call to adventure. But things change. Things can change for donors, too. Financial circumstances can shift. Businesses can be sold. Investments can go well. Inheritances can arrive. Estate plans can be revised. The opportunity to accept the compelling heroic challenge may arise again. Today’s “no,” can still become tomorrow’s “yes.”

I’m so sorry, you got a “yes”

Not every request is met with resistance. Sometimes the donor immediately says, “Yes.” What then? We thank the donor for the gift. We express gratitude for the impact the gift will have. We confirm the precise date, time, and manner of transfer. (A simple gift agreement sometimes helps.) And then, we stop. As the West Texas saying goes, “Once you hit oil, stop drilling.”

But a quick “yes” might show something else. Part of the story might be missing. If the hero doesn’t initially resist the “call to adventure,” was it really a heroic request after all? If the donor didn’t need to think about it, was it really a sacrificial gift? Did we really advance the donor’s *hero* story? Experienced fundraisers recognize this reality. One shares this,

> “If they say ‘yes’ straight away when you ask for a specific amount, the chances are that you have not asked for enough.”[30]

The final ask

Whether the visit results in a gift or not, there can be one final ask. This ask is for referrals. It might sound like this:

- “Do you know other people that may be interested in learning about what we’re doing?”[31]
- “Can you name three friends/colleagues who might like to learn more about our organization or who might also be interested in serving as volunteers?”[32]

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[30] Managementcentre. (2016, March 11). *7 Steps of Solicitation*. Retrieved from managementcentre.co.uk/fundraising/7-steps-of-solicitation/
[31] Baker, B., Bullock, K., Gifford, G. L., Grow, P., Jacobwith, L. L., Pitman, M. A., Truhlar, S., & Rees, S. (2013). *The essential fundraising handbook for small nonprofits.* The Nonprofit Academy, p. 154.
[32] Greenhoe, J. (2013). *Opening the door to major gifts: Mastering the discovery call.* CharityChannel Press. p. 58.

- "Who do you know that may be interested in our work? Would you send a note to introduce me, or arrange for us to do lunch? You like to entertain – how about a dinner party or reception? How about tagging along on a donor visit and sharing your experience with our nonprofit?"[33]

Plan to fail

In the monomyth, the hero first refuses the call to adventure. In advancing the donor's hero story, a "no" is a typical part of the process. Understanding this means we plan for it.

So, for example, we don't leave the ask until the end of the scheduled time. A "no" can be an excellent start. But the follow up is critical. And it takes time.

It also means that we emotionally plan for a "no." It's not a jolt. It's not a cause for disappointment. It's part of the journey.

Plan to fail: A professor story

I've been the dissertation advisor for many Ph.D. students over the years. These students have gone on to be faculty members at many universities. To succeed there, they must publish research in academic journals. A critical part of this success is

[33] Pittman-Schulz, K. (2012, October). *In the door and then what?* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, New Orleans, LA. p. 14.

planning to fail. How so? The publishing plan should be,

> "I will submit to Journal A. Then, I'll use the reviews from the rejection to improve the manuscript for Journal B. Then, I'll use those rejection reviews to improve the manuscript for Journal C. And Journal C will publish the manuscript."

Rejection becomes normal and expected. It's a natural part of the process. It triggers immediate revision and resubmission.

What if instead the plan were to just publish in Journal A? Then things change. A rejection is devastating. Engaging with the negative reviews is emotionally painful. The revision hurts. It gets delayed. The manuscript sits on the desk. And "publish or perish" leads to job loss. Framing the rejection as part of the process – not some devastating aberration – helps. It leads to the right behaviors.

In the same way, planning for the "no" is important for the fundraiser. If any single behavior separates the successful fundraisers (or researchers) it is this: persistence. Having the right story framework helps.

The right story emotionally supports the right behaviors. The "no" is not a source of pain. It's an important step in the journey. It opens the door to important questions. It's part of the process. It's part of the story.

Conclusion

Making a compelling, heroic challenge is an accomplishment. It is not every day that people receive an epic "call to adventure." The ask can make a lasting impact even when the answer is "no."

The "no," is not a problem for the guiding sage. The sage resumes the story role. The sage resumes the story cycle. The sage persists. As the famous monomyth guiding sage Yoda explains,

> "You think Yoda stops teaching, just because his student does not want to hear? A teacher Yoda is. Yoda teaches like drunkards drink, like killers kill."[34]

Postscript: The scariest ask
The script for handling the fundraising "no" from Tony Soprano

YOU: ... would you consider a gift of a million dollars to kick off the campaign for the Anthony and Carmelo Soprano Athletic Center at the St. Thomas High School?

TONY: [*Laughter*.] You've got to be kidding me!

YOU: [*Silence... but you smile, reflecting his response*.]

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[34] Stewart, S. (2014). *Yoda: Dark rendezvous (Star wars: Clone wars).* Ballantine Books. p. 301.

TONY: A million bucks! I don't know what you've been smoking, but I want some!

YOU: OK, OK [*Smiling*], I understand. [*This shows reflection*.]

YOU: Help me out here. Do you mind if I ask a couple of questions to see where I got off track? [*This asks for permission*].

TONY: Yeah, I'm not giving you a million bucks. That's where you ***ing got off track!

YOU: [*Smiling*.] I hear what you're saying. [*This shows reflection*.]

[*Now, you resume the story*.]

Look, I know you've supported this school for years. Everyone in the community sees you as a leader at the school. We've been part of your life, and your family's life for such a long time, so I've got to ask, have your feelings about the school changed? [*This affirms the story. It shows Original Identity → Challenge*.]

TONY: No, no. Look, the school's a good thing. That's fine. But I'm more of a '$20 bill in the G-string' guy, not a "buy her a whole **ing house" guy, right?

YOU: I understand. Now, the people running the school … you've known Mrs. Smith for, what, 12 years? Do you feel like they would use the building in the right way to make the kind of impact you would want to see? [*This affirms the story. It shows Challenge → Victory*.]

TONY: Sure, these are good people. I don't see them doing stupid things.

YOU: And this project – The Soprano Athletic Center – do you see that as making a real impact in our community here for a long time? It would have been a big deal for you when you were a kid growing up here, right? [*This affirms the story. It shows Victory → Enhanced Identity.*]

TONY: Oh, sure, it's a good thing. Give the kids something to do instead of robbing or breaking stuff. But look, I'm not going to pay for this whole thing now. Maybe someday when I retire rich, I can write you that check.

YOU: So, it sounds to me like this is a gift you would want to make if you could, but the finances are just too much right now? [*This diagnoses and isolates the story barrier.*]

TONY: Yeah, that's just the wrong price tag for me.

YOU: Now, you know this is a pledge that can be paid out over the five-year campaign. So, that's $200,000 each year. Does that help at all? [*This attacks the story barrier.*]

TONY: I don't know. That's still a lot of cash.

YOU: Yes, it is. Let me ask you, have you ever thought about giving stocks or real estate instead?

TONY: [*Gives a quizzical look.*]

YOU: The reason I ask is that I work with a lot of folks in your situation. They want to make a really big impact with a great project, but the cost is too big of a barrier. So, here's what they do. They get the government to pay for more of it by being smarter about giving.

YOU: Let me give you an example. Say someone has a building or some stocks worth $200,000 – the annual pledge amount for this project. But maybe they bought it for only $20,000. The problem is this. If they sell it, they don't get to keep the full $200,000. Here in New Jersey, they might lose a third to the government in taxes. So, they actually walk away with only $138,000.

TONY: Tell me about it. Those taxes are a racket!

YOU: But if they donate it instead, they avoid all those taxes. And they still get the full $200,000 deduction off their income taxes. That deduction can save them up to 47 cents on the dollar.

YOU: So, if they sell the property, they net $138,000. If they donate it instead, they net up to $94,000. Their net cost is just the $44,000 difference between selling and donating. The school still gets a $200,000 gift. The tax benefits pay for the rest.

TONY: So, this thing. It works with a building, like a warehouse?

YOU: Sure, any assets that have gone up in value.

TONY: What about a business like an "entertainment establishment" or a used car dealership?

YOU: Definitely. I'd love to put together some ideas for you to look at. Just give me some examples of assets – what you paid, what they're worth – no obligation. I know the Soprano Athletic Center seems like a reach right now, but I can work with our experts, put together a plan, and you just tell us what you think. Do you mind if we get together for a visit on Tuesday the 4th to look at some options?

TONY: I guess it wouldn't hurt. Tuesday? ...

11

Socratic Fundraising "Legacy Edition": How to Ask for the Gift in a Will without Fear or Anxiety

Sure, asking for money is hard. But asking for an estate gift? Even experienced fundraisers can get squeamish. As Anne Melvin puts it,

> "For many of us, asking for a bequest is akin to asking, '*So when are you going to die and what are you going to leave us when you do?*'[1]

And yet, it's vital. The right ask can be powerful. So, how can we do this? What are the right words and phrases? To answer this, let's start with theory.

Theory and death reminders

Why is this so … uncomfortable? Simple answer. Because it's about death. Death is an

[1] Melvin, A. (2011, October). *Mission possible: Get in the door and get what you came for* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, San Antonio, TX. p. 8.

uncomfortable topic.[2] More than that, the reality of our own death is a serious psychological problem. People use two "solutions" to the problem: [3]

1. Ignore the problem. (This is called "avoidance.")
2. Live on after death. (This is called "symbolic immortality.")

Avoidance

Avoidance actively ignores personal mortality. It runs away from death reminders. It says, "This doesn't apply to me." It says, "I'll deal with that later." It's why most people don't have wills.[4] It's why attendance at "planned giving" seminars is so small.

Symbolic immortality

Living on after death isn't just about a religious afterlife. It means some part of one's identity – one's people, values, or story – will continue on after death. This continuation is called "symbolic immortality." Death reminders increase the desire for this "symbolic

[2] Kastenbaum, R. (2000). *Psychology of death* (3rd ed.). Springer. p. 98. (explaining that there is "general agreement that most of us prefer to minimize even our cognitive encounters with death.")
[3] Kosloff, S., Anderson, G., Nottbohm, A., & Hoshiko, B. (2019). Proximal and distal terror management defenses: A systematic review and analysis. In *Handbook of Terror Management Theory* (pp. 31-63). Academic Press; Pyszczynski, T., Greenberg, J., & Solomon, S. (1999). A dual-process model of defense against conscious and unconscious death-related thoughts: an extension of terror management theory. *Psychological Review, 106*(4), 835-845.
[4] James, R. N., III. (2020). The emerging potential of longitudinal empirical research in estate planning: Examples from charitable bequests. *UC Davis Law Review, 53*, 2397-2431.

immortality." They increase interest in making a lasting impact. But to be meaningful, the impact must support one's people, values, or story.

Research experiments show this. For example, death reminders make people more protective of their social group – and more resistant to outside groups.[5] Group opinions and social "norms" become more powerful.[6] People become more interested in social prestige,[7] fame,[8] a positive life story,[9] personal

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[5] *See* Burke, B. L., Martens, A., & Faucher, E. H. (2010). Two decades of terror management theory: A meta-analysis of mortality salience research. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 14*(2), 155-195; James, R. N., III. (2016). An economic model of mortality salience in personal financial decision making: Applications to annuities, life insurance, charitable gifts, estate planning, conspicuous consumption, and healthcare. *Journal of Financial Therapy, 7*(2), 62-82.

[6] *See, e.g.,* Fritsche, I., Jonas, E., Kayser, D. N., & Koranyi, N. (2010). Existential threat and compliance with pro-environmental norms. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 30*(1), 67-79; Gailliot, M. T., Stillman, T. F., Schmeichel, B. J., Maner, J. K., & Plant, E. A. (2008). Mortality salience increases adherence to salient norms and values. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 34*(7), 993-1003.

[7] van Bommel, T., O'Dwyer, C., Zuidgeest, T. W., & Poletiek, F. H. (2015). When the reaper becomes a salesman: The influence of terror management on product preferences. *Journal of Economic & Financial Studies, 3*(05), 33-42.

[8] Greenberg, J., Kosloff, S., Solomon, S., Cohen, F., & Landau, M. (2010). Toward understanding the fame game: The effect of mortality salience on the appeal of fame. *Self and Identity, 9*(1), 1-18.

[9] Dechesne, M., Pyszczynski, T., Arndt, J., Ransom, S., Sheldon, K. M., Van Knippenberg, A., & Janssen, J. (2003). Literal and symbolic immortality: The effect of evidence of literal immortality on self-esteem striving in response to mortality salience. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(4), 722; Landau, M. J., Greenberg, J., & Sullivan, D. (2009). Defending a coherent autobiography: When past events appear incoherent, mortality salience prompts compensatory bolstering of the past's significance and the future's orderliness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 35*(8), 1012-1020.

heroism,[10] or putting their name on something.[11] Death reminders highlight the question, "What will they say about me when I'm gone?"[12]

Phrasing = Preface + Ask

Academic theory is fine, but how do we actually do this? What do we say? The legacy ask usually consists of two parts: a preface and an ask. The preface makes the ask more comfortable. It provides motivation. It justifies the question or the gift. The ask then triggers a response.

Let's look at some examples from experienced fundraisers. The ask itself can be harder or softer. It can be simple and blunt.

The simple ask: Will you?

Examples of the simple ask include,

[10] McCabe, S., Carpenter, R. W., & Arndt, J. (2015). The role of mortality awareness in heroic enactment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 61*, 104-109; McCabe, S., Carpenter, R. W., & Arndt, J. (2016). The role of mortality awareness in hero identification. *Self and Identity, 15*(6), 707-726.

[11] *See* Burke, B. L., Martens, A., & Faucher, E. H. (2010). Two decades of terror management theory: A meta-analysis of mortality salience research. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 14*(2), 155-195; James, R. N., III. (2016). An economic model of mortality salience in personal financial decision making: Applications to annuities, life insurance, charitable gifts, estate planning, conspicuous consumption, and healthcare. *Journal of Financial Therapy, 7*(2), 62-82.

[12] *See, e.g.,* Cohen, D. (2017). *What will they say about you when you're gone? Creating a life of legacy.* Health Communications, Inc.

- "Would you be willing to include our organization in your estate plans?"[13]
- "Say, Bill, does your will provide something for the [organization]?"[14]
- "Would you join me as a member of our Legacy Society by making a planned gift?"[15]
- Would you join me in making a legacy commitment?[16]
- "Have you remembered XYZ in your will?"[17]
- "Can you tell me if we are included in your will plans?"

The soft ask: Would you consider?

The ask can be a little softer. One approach is to add a phrase like "would you consider." Examples include,

- "Would you be willing to consider including us as one of the nonprofit organizations in your will?"[18]

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[13] Zou, H. & Schmitt, P. (2017). *The real reason donors aren't making planned gifts, and what to do about it.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 37.
[14] Seymour, H. (1999). *Designs for fund-raising* (2nd ed.). The Gale Group. p. 134.
[15] Sargeant, A. & Shang, J. (2010). *Fundraising principles and practice*. Jossey-Bass, p. 427.
[16] Fridman, N. (2021, May 26). *Why now is the perfect time to have a conversation about values, giving and your family's legacy* [PowerPoint slides]. Life and Legacy Annual Gathering, online. p. 22.
[17] Ciconte, B. L. & Jacob, J. G. (2009). *Fundraising basics: A complete guide*. Jones & Bartlett Learning. p. 318.
[18] Zou, H. & Schmitt, P. (2017). *The real reason donors aren't making planned gifts, and what to do about it.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD. p. 37.

- "Would you consider … including us in your estate plans?"[19]
- "Will you consider putting this organization in your will?"[20]
- "Would you consider leaving a [specific amount or percentage] of your estate to our organization?"[21]
- "Would you consider a pledge commitment that isn't paid until you pass or when you no longer need it?"[22]
- "Would you consider making a legacy gift?"[23]
- "Of the types of planned gifts that we've talked about, which one would you consider?"[24]

The softer ask: Thoughts?

The ask can be softened even further. One way is to simply ask for "thoughts" on the topic. Examples include,

[19] Shuba, J. J. (2020, October). *Navigating planned gift conversations with your donors*. [Paper presentation]. Charitable Gift Planning Conference, online, p. 2.
[20] Samers, W. D. (2011, October). *Creative bequests and the unalterable will: Soliciting and drafting bequests.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, San Antonio, Texas, p. 10.
[21] Henson, R. (2016). *Planned giving: How to ask for transformational gifts*. iUniverse. p. 54.
[22] Buderus, A. A. & Smith, G. P. (2013, October). *Blended gift, eh? Making the most of this emerging workhorse for major and planned gift officers.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Minneapolis, MN, p. 9.
[23] Lassonde, G. (2013, October). *The "why" of giving & getting to the legacy ask.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Minneapolis, MN, p. 6.
[24] Sargeant, A. & Shang, J. (2010). *Fundraising principles and practice*. Jossey-Bass. p. 427.

- "What are your thoughts about making this kind of gift?"
- "Do you know that we have a legacy society that recognizes our donors who have included our organization in their future plans? … Is that something you and I should be talking about?"[25]
- "What would you say to someone who might be considering including us in their last will & testament?"

The softest ask: Silence

The softest ask is merely implied. This approach begins with a preface. The preface mentions a gift in a will. This is followed by silence. The other person can continue that conversation. Or they can take it another direction. It all depends on their interest and comfort level.

Use an ask phrase that fits your comfort level. Or begin with a softer approach and then move to a more direct one.

Ask research: "Gift in a will"

Ask phrases are relatively simple. But words still matter. In one experiment, the likelihood of agreeing to

[25] Tumolo, J. (2016). *Simplify: A simple approach to building a sustainable planned giving program*. Independently published. p. 44.

- "Make a gift to charity in my last will & testament"

dropped significantly when replacing "make a gift" with either,

- "Leave a legacy gift," or
- "Make a bequest gift."[26]

In another experiment, people were twice as likely to want to read about,

- "Gifts in wills,"

as compared with

- "Estate giving,"
- "Legacy giving," or
- "Bequest gifts."[27]

The same was true for

- "Will planning"

as compared with either

- "Estate planning" or
- "Legacy planning."[28]

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[26] James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations,* 27(2), 998-1011.
[27] James, R. N., III. (2018). Creating understanding and interest in charitable financial and estate planning: An experimental test of introductory phrases. *Journal of Personal Finance, 17*(2), 9-21. Table 4.
[28] *Id.*

Some people perceive words like "estate" or "legacy," as a bit too grand.[29] Those are for wealthy people – like on Downton Abbey. Those don't apply to "people like me." But a "gift in a will" applies to everyone.

If "gifts in wills" or "will planning" seems too narrow, don't worry. People use these terms to refer to all estate transfers, including

- Living trusts
- Life insurance
- IRA transfer-on-death, and
- Bank account transfer-on-death.

Oddly, people were *more* likely to expect this full range of topics from clicking on

- "Gifts in wills" or
- "Will planning"

than from either,

- "Estate giving" or
- "Estate planning."[30]

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[29] Sargeant, A. (2014, May 2). *Personal communication.* Professor Adrian Sargeant, Plymouth University. Comment regarding unpublished focus group results.

[30] James, R. N., III. (2018). Creating understanding and interest in charitable financial and estate planning: An experimental test of introductory phrases. *Journal of Personal Finance, 17*(2), 9-21. Table 5.

A longer list can also work if it *starts* with "gifts in wills." For example, the share of people indicating they "might be" or "were definitely" interested in reading more on a charity website was

- 26% for "Gifts in wills,"
- 25% for "Gifts in wills, trusts, or retirement accounts," and
- 24% for "Gifts in wills, trusts, retirement accounts, or life insurance."[31]

For other planned giving instruments, the rule is simple. Simple words outperform technical ones.[32]

Ask research: Death avoidance

It's important not to describe a gift with "death" language. In experiments, people were much more willing to,

- "Make a gift to charity in my last will & testament," than to
- "Make a gift to charity in my last will & testament that will take effect at my death."[33]

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[31] Unpublished results from the study reported in James, R. N., III. (2018). Creating understanding and interest in charitable financial and estate planning: An experimental test of introductory phrases. *Journal of Personal Finance, 17*(2), 9-21.
[32] James, R. N., III. (2018). Describing complex charitable giving instruments: Experimental tests of technical finance terms and tax benefits. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 28*(4), 437-452.
[33] James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations,* 27(2), 998-1011.

The gift was the same. But the description was different. Adding death reminders can trigger an "avoidance" response.

Another experiment showed this for annuities.[34] People were more likely to purchase one paying

- "Each year you live," rather than one paying
- "Each year you live until you die."

In another example, Patrick Schmitt of FreeWill shared,

> "We just finished testing 50 different headlines (across approximately 12,000 people) to get folks to make planned gifts, and one headline performed nearly two times better than everything else ... Here's the headline: 'Even if you plan to live to 150, you still need to make a plan.'"[35]

A later presentation shared an updated version as,

> "Even if you plan to live to 150, you still need a will. Get started today."[36]

[34] Salisbury, L. C., & Nenkov, G. Y. (2016). Solving the annuity puzzle: The role of mortality salience in retirement savings decumulation decisions. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 26*(3), 417-425. (Study 3, Table 2: 25.8% chose the annuity option when described as paying "each year you live until you die" and 35.8% did so when described as paying "each year you live".)
[35] Schmitt, P. (2019, March 7). *14 magic words for planned giving.* [Blog.] https://medium.com/freewill-insights/14-magic-words-for-planned-giving-a641e1b77ed6
[36] Schmitt, P. (2021, February 23). *3 strategies for success with older donors in 2021*. [Webinar slide deck]. Slide 47.

These headlines don't lead with death. They do the opposite. They lead with long life. Signing a will is for people planning to live a long time.

A logical headline might instead be,

> "You should make a will because you might die tomorrow!"

But this doesn't work. It leads with death. Death reminders trigger avoidance.

The preface

The preface comes before the ask. But it's not mandatory. We can just make a "naked" ask. In one experiment, 2,000 people were completing their will planning.[37] Half weren't specifically asked about charity. In this group, 4.9% left a gift to charity. The other half were asked,

> "Would you like to leave any money to charity in your will?"

In this group, 10.8% included a gift to charity. Just asking the question, by itself, worked. It doubled the share of wills including charity.

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https://f.hubspotusercontent10.net/hubfs/7139016/FW%20Webinar%20-%20Older%20donors.pdf

[37] Cabinet Office. (2013). *Applying behavioral insights to charitable giving.* Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team. pp. 22-23. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/203286/BIT_Charitable_Giving_Paper.pdf

Asking works. But it's often more comfortable or compelling to start with a preface. This can include

- The external issue preface. [This matches the *avoidance* response.]
- The identity preface. [This matches the *symbolic immortality* response.]
- The victory preface. [This also matches the *symbolic immortality* response.]

Let's look at examples of each.

External issue preface examples

Many people tend to avoid estate planning. Why? Because it's a death reminder. So, it can help to have a *non-death* reason to start the conversation. We wouldn't normally bring it up. It's just that some outside issue is pushing the conversation. This might be because of

- A campaign deadline
- A matching gift deadline
- A problem, or
- It's my job.

It can also help to have a *non-death* reason to sign the will now. If the donor signs it now, something important happens. Example phrases include

1. *Campaign deadline*

    - Legacy campaign deadline
      "We're in a campaign to get 100 new legacy society members before the end of the year. We're making great progress, and … [ask]"
    - Combined campaign deadline
      "So far, we're at 72% of our campaign goal for current gifts and 68% of our goal for planned gifts in wills. You've already helped us in the first goal … [ask]"
    - Leadership campaign deadline
      "The new planned giving campaign starts this fall. We'll be announcing our board participation at the banquet. Signing your gift in a will before then could really influence others to take this step … [ask]"

2. *Matching gift deadline*

    - "If signed by May 1, planned gifts of up to $250,000 will be matched with a 10% cash donation in your name from The XYZ Foundation."[38]

      [For several charities, this approach has doubled or tripled planned estate gifts.[39]]

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[38] Modified from "Bequest Matching Form" at *https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/aclu_legacy_challenge_form.pdf*

[39] Kendrick, J. & Tsai, C. (2017, October). *Implementing a legacy challenge match program at a major, multifaceted institution.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, Baltimore, MD; Lydenberg, J. (2016, June). *Meeting the challenge of raising more planned gifts.* PG Calc Featured Article. https://www.pgcalc.com/pdf/0616-Featured-Article.pdf

3. *We've got a problem*
   - "We've run into a bit of an issue. The number of new people joining our legacy society has fallen off in the last year. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions about your thoughts on this topic?"[40]
   - "We need your advice on some new legacy fundraising ads. Would you mind sharing your thoughts on a few examples?"[41]
   - "We held a planned giving seminar, but people didn't show up. We're trying to figure out why. So, we're asking donors like you to share your thoughts in a focus group. Would you be willing to take part?"[42]

4. *Helping you is my job*
   - "My job is to help donors plan their gifts. I help them make a lasting impact that is personally meaningful. This might look at multi-year strategies or even a gift in a will. Would you be willing to look at some of these options together?"

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[40] Concept from Sargeant, A. & Stergiou, C. (2019, January 10). Personal communication. Message from Christiana Stergiou, Co-Founder of Moceanic, referencing text copy originating from Adrian Sargeant, Co-Founder of Institute for Sustainable Philanthropy.
[41] Concept from Davis, L. & Biles, S. (2019, March). Reinventing an established gifts in wills program. [Slide deck]. Fundraising Institute of Australia Conference 2019, Melbourne, Australia.
[42] Concept from Bigelow, B. E. & Kolmerten, C. A. (2008, April) Focusing on planned giving: Using focus groups to find new donors, Journal of Gift Planning, 12(2), 18-21, http://charitabledevelopmentconsulting.com/s/Focusing-on-Planned-Giving-Using-Focus-Groups-to-Find-New-Donors.pdf

- "Part of my job is to show donors how to give smarter. For example, any IRA money inherited by family members triggers income tax. But naming [our charity] avoids those taxes. I'd love to show you some of these options. Would you mind getting together for a visit about this?"

These each give a reason to act. The reasons are about external, non-death issues. They're about campaigns, matching gifts, influencing others, sharing opinions, or tax benefits. The motivation isn't about death. This deflects the avoidance response. It makes starting the conversation easier.

Identity preface theory

A compelling fundraising ask (or "challenge") will include the steps of

Original Identity → Challenge → Victory → Enhanced Identity

The resulting enhanced identity can be public (reputation) or private (personal meaning). In a cycle, these steps are

Challenge
↗ ↘
Identity ← Victory

Death reminders not only trigger avoidance. They also trigger pursuit of symbolic immortality. This is a resistance to disappearing. It increases attraction to ways in which one's identity – rooted in one's people, values, or history – can live on.[43] A gift in a will can help. It helps when it continues the donor's identity. It helps when it links to the donor's people, values, or history.

The core message in the identity preface is this:

"People like me make gifts like this."
[Original Identity → Challenge]

First, this says to the donor, "*You* are the kind of person who makes gifts like this." Why is this true? Because the gift matches the donor's history, behaviors, values, beliefs, or group membership. In other words, the gift matches the donor's identity.

It also says, "*Other people* like you make gifts like this." These are people who *share* the donor's history, behaviors, values, beliefs, or group membership. In other words, they share the donor's identity.

Identity preface examples

What does this look like in the real world? Here are some examples.

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[43] This dual result from death reminders means we don't *always* want to avoid them. Certainly, if we want a larger audience, avoiding death reminders is important. If people can avoid a personal mortality related topic, many of them will. But once we have a "captive" audience, avoidance may not be an option. In that case, death reminders can help. They can help because they also trigger a desire for pursuing "symbolic immortality," also known as a lasting social impact. Typically, this is expressed by an increased desire to benefit heirs (rather than personal consumption), but it can also fuel the desire to make an impact on one's community or "in-group."

- "Many donors who give as regularly as you have put our organization in their will; what are your thoughts about doing that?"[44]
- "Mrs. Jones, you are such a wonderful and loyal donor. Many of our most loyal donors are including Kent State in their estate plans in order to make an impact beyond their lifetime. Have you ever considered remembering Kent State in your will?"[45]
- "I can't say thank you enough for all your support for so many years. Would you consider extending your amazing legacy by including us in your estate plans?"[46]
- "Thank you so much for all your support for so many years – we truly appreciate it. Donors like you who have supported us for so long often include a gift in their estate plans. I'd love to say thank you for that as well if you've done so. Have you included us? Have you considered it?"[47]
- "John, you've been a terrific supporter of Friends of Shakespeare. I want to thank you for all you have done for us over the years. I'm curious: what are your thoughts about

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[44] Melvin, A. T. (2014, October). *The art (and science) of persuasion*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference for Philanthropic Planning, Anaheim, CA. p. 9.
[45] Aleman, M. (2011, October). *Harness the power of your phone center to increase planned gifts.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, San Antonio, TX. p. 4.
[46] Shuba, J. J. (2020, October). *Navigating planned gift conversations with your donors.* [Paper presentation]. National Charitable Gift Planners Conference. p. 2.
[47] *Id.*

becoming a member of the Fortinbras Society?" [Response:] "What is the Fortinbras Society?" This allows you to describe other committed members of the society, mention some that he knows …"[48]

- "I've found the mission so compelling and the programs so meaningful that a few years ago I made a planned gift because I wanted to make certain that my support continued into the future. Other people I've met have wanted to make sure that their support continues as well and have let us know that they've made legacy gifts too. Could I take a few minutes before we're finished here and tell you, briefly, about our legacy giving program and how we plan to use these gifts?"[49]

Identity preface research: People like you

Does this really work? Experimental results say, "Yes." In a test with 3,000 people completing their will documents,

- 4.9% left a gift to charity without being asked. [They had no *challenge*.]

[48] Melvin, A. (2011, October). *Mission possible: Get in the door and get what you came for.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, San Antonio, TX. p. 7.
[49] Swank, K. (2009, October). *What women want: Understanding the needs and objectives of women's philanthropic giving, including planned gifts.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, National Harbor, MD. p. 10.

- 10.8% did so when asked, “Would you like to leave any money to charity in your will?” [They had a *challenge*.]
- 15.4% did so when the ask began with, “many of our customers like to leave money to charity in their will…”[50] [This connected *identity* (people like the donor) with the *challenge*.]

The last group was more than 3x as likely to include a gift. Also, their average gift size was twice as large. Thus, asking the right question led to a six-fold increase in legacy giving.

In another experiment, people read the story of another donor, Sara. She had made a planned gift. The effect of this story on their interest in making the gift varied. Statistically, it depended on their response to this question:

> Question: “How much do you identify with Sara?”
>
> Options: “She is [__ a lot __somewhat __a little bit __not really __not at all] like me.”[51]

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[50] The full sentence was “many of our customers like to leave money to charity in their will. Are there any causes you’re passionate about?” However, in subsequent testing, I found that only the first part increased bequest giving intentions. Thus, I exclude the second part here to emphasize the social norm statement only. Quoted from Cabinet Office. (2013). *Applying behavioral insights to charitable giving.* Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team. p. 22-23. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/203286/BIT_Charitable_Giving_Paper.pdf

[51] James, R. N., III. (2019). Using donor images in marketing complex charitable financial planning instruments: An experimental test with charitable gift annuities. *Journal of Personal Finance. 18*(1), 65-74.

A story about someone the person felt was "like me" was powerful. Otherwise, it wasn't.

Identity preface research: Your life story

Another experiment showed the power of life story references.[52] It tested 24 bequest gift descriptions among nearly 10,000 participants. The phrase generating the highest intention to give was,

> "Make a gift to charity in your will to support causes that have been important in your life."

This worked much better than simply,

> "Make a gift to charity in your will."

Adding the last phrase was powerful. It connected the gift to the donor's values and life story. This increased giving intentions.

Other results show the same answer.[53] The social norm statement,

> "Many people like to leave a gift to charity in their will"

became more effective when it was changed to,

> "Many people like to leave a gift to charity in their will because they care about causes that are important in their lives."

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[52] James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations,* 27(2), 998-1011.
[53] *Id.*

The social norm was no longer just about other people making gifts. Now, it was about other people making gifts that connected with their values and life story. This made the social norm more powerful.

The donor's life story comes up in other types of research, too. This theme arises in qualitative interviews with bequest donors.[54] It even matches with neuroimaging research. Charitable bequest decisions engage "visualized autobiography" brain regions.[55]

Identity preface research: Your people (family tribute)

Identity comes from one's people, values, and history. A bequest gift in honor of a loved one links to the donor's people. One experiment used the following steps:[56]

1. Ask if there was a "friend or family member who would have appreciated (or would appreciate) your support of [Cause Type] such as [Organization Examples]"

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[54] Routley, C. J. (2011). *Leaving a charitable legacy: Social influence, the self and symbolic immortality.* [Ph.D. dissertation]. University of the West of England, Bristol, UK. p. 220. ("When discussing which charities they had chosen to remember, there was a clear link with the life narratives of many respondents.")

[55] James, R. N., III & O'Boyle, M. W. (2014). Charitable estate planning as visualized autobiography: An fMRI study of its neural correlates. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 43*(2), 355-373.

[56] James, R. N., III. (2015). The family tribute in charitable bequest giving: An experimental test of the effect of reminders on giving intentions. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 26*(1), 73-89.

2. Ask about the friend or family member's connection to the cause.
3. Ask about a bequest gift "honoring a deceased [or living] friend or family member"

Doing this worked. It dramatically increased charitable bequest intentions.

In practice, introducing this idea can be simple. Suppose a response card asks,

> "Have you included [this charity] in your will or estate plan?"

Under "□ Yes" simply add,

> "□ in honor or memory of __________ (person) __________ (relationship)"

Whether or not the card is returned, it can still work. It can work just by introducing the idea. In one experiment, mentioning this option helped. It increased interest in a bequest gift for one out of four people.[57]

In conversation we can ask,

[57] Unpublished results from an online survey conducted by author in November of 2014. After reporting interest in making any gift to charity in a will, respondents were then asked a second question. Some were asked to report interest in "Honor a family member by making a memorial gift to charity in my will." 24% (119 of 504) reported greater interest in this second gift. Others were asked to report interest in "Honor a family member by making a tribute gift to charity in my will." 29% (147 of 505) reported greater interest in this second gift.

> "Some of the people with whom I meet are interested in hearing about ways to honor and memorialize their loved ones. Would you like to hear more about this option?"[58]

Victory preface research: Permanence

The final justification for a bequest gift is the most powerful. This is the "victory" justification. A victory describes a visualizable, personally meaningful outcome.[59]

Such "victory" outcomes are powerful for any type of gift. But legacy giving responds best to outcomes with *permanence*. Death reminds donors that they're going to disappear. Legacy giving can help. It helps *if* it provides a way in which the donor's identity – their people, values, or story – can live on.

Drs. Claire Routley and Adrian Sargeant explain,

> "The choice of charity to receive a bequest gift could, therefore, be a way of extending one's

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[58] Brovey, A. P. & Roenigk, P. L. (2008, October 25). *How old are you and did you know you could…. Initiating planned gift discussions and getting answers to key questions.* [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Planned Giving, Denver, CO. p. 14.

[59] Anne Melvin shares this example, "We need you to establish a $100,000 charitable remainder unitrust for financial aid so that students in the future like Erick Pomeroy from Santa Fe who we just discussed can come here in the future, even if they have a father who passes away in their junior year, like Erick's did. Will you do that for us?" Melvin, A. (2011, October). *Mission possible: Get in the door and get what you came for*. [Paper presentation]. National Conference on Philanthropic Planning, San Antonio, TX. p. 4.

autobiography, and thus a sense of self, forward in time beyond one's physical death."[60]

This desire for gift permanence shows up in experiments. In one, a poverty relief charity was described as either,

1. "Meeting the immediate needs of people," or
2. "Creating lasting improvements that would benefit people in the future."

Normally, the first description generated more gifts. But for people reminded of their mortality, the results reversed.[61] Death reminders made the permanence language more attractive.

Other experiments show similar results. In one, people were three times more likely to prefer permanent funds for bequest gifts than for current gifts.[62] In another, the most powerful motivation to

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[60] Routley, C., & Sargeant, A. (2015). Leaving a bequest: Living on through charitable gifts. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 44*(5), 869-885, 876.
[61] Wade-Benzoni, K. A., Tost, L. P., Hernandez, M., & Larrick, R. P. (2012). It's only a matter of time: Death, legacies, and intergenerational decisions. *Psychological Science, 23*(7), 704-709.
[62] Unpublished results from an online survey conducted by author in March and April of 2013. Respondents chose between "an immediate expenditure of all funds to advance the cause of the charity" and "the establishment of a permanent fund generating perpetual income to advance the cause of the charity forever." Among 881 respondents, 319 reported a different preference for current and bequest gifts to the same organizations. Of these 243 (76.2%) preferred more permanence for the bequest gift and 76 (23.8%) preferred more permanence for the current gift.

make a second gift in memory of a loved one was the chance to make the fund permanent.[63]

Victory preface examples: Permanence

The ultimate "victory" in legacy giving is symbolic immortality. The donor's identity – his people, values, or story – lives on after death. Once the fundraiser understands this, she can use it. She can construct legacy "products" or giving opportunities that deliver this lasting impact.

Just using permanence language to describe the gift's impact can help. But often, this will take the form of a permanent structure. This might be a scholarship, lectureship, or professorship. It might be an endowment funding a favorite part of operations. It might simply endow lifetime giving. (If the charity is new or unstable, it might use an established community foundation to manage this fund.)

The ask can include permanence language. For example,

> "Would you consider leaving a legacy of a $100,000 bequest to ensure that the help you provide these families will continue in perpetuity?"[64]

Even more powerfully, the ask can reference both

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[63] James, R. N., III. (2019). Encouraging repeated memorial donations to a scholarship fund: An experimental test of permanence goals and anniversary acknowledgements. *Philanthropy & Education, 2*(2), 1-28.
[64] Levine, J. & Selik, L. A. (2016). *Compelling conversations for fundraisers: Talk your way to success with donors and funders*. Chimayo Press. p.74

identity connections and victory permanence. This ask includes the full story cycle. It includes identity, challenge, and victory. For example,

- "You've been such a wonderful friend to [this charity] over the years. Many people like you want to include a gift in their will. My job is to help them plan that out, so their gift will make a lasting impact. Do you mind if I share some options with you?"
- "Look, Bob, you've given to us for 8 years now. You given over $300,000. That's fantastic! I'm here to build [this charity] for the long run and you're building that with us. Have you thought about having [this charity] as part of your legacy plan?"[65]

Victory preface research: Define a victory

Large estate gifts come with instructions. It is the instructions – the story – that make large gifts compelling. This is nothing new. In two studies of wills from the 1800s,[66] charitable bequests were restricted in,

- 14% of small cash gifts,

[65] von Laer, W. (2019, October 23). Building an impactful development team. [Audio podcast]. Bragdon, T. (Host). *7-Figure Fundraising Podcast.* Spotify. https://open.spotify.com/show/6ftRSw1hCnB8NAGcO8d3QW at 29:10.

[66] *See* summary in James, R. N., III. (2020). American charitable bequest transfers across the centuries: Empirical findings and implications for policy and practice. *Estate Planning & Community Property Law Journal, 12*, 235-285, 241-242 citing to Knaplund, K. S. (2015). Becoming charitable: Predicting and encouraging charitable bequests in wills. *University of Pittsburgh Law Review, 77*, 1-49.

- 58% of real estate or large cash gifts, and
- 70% of gifts of a share of the entire estate.

Large gifts produce a specific, usually lasting, impact. That's the motivation for the *size* of the gift. Legacy income is all about the size of the gifts, not the number of donors. The money comes almost entirely from extreme gifts.

For example, most charitable decedents (60%) leave less than 10% of their estates to charity. These are the "normal" donors. Taken together, they transfer only 3.8% of all charitable bequest dollars.[67] The money doesn't come from normal charitable decedents. It comes from extreme gifts.

The identity preface works to get a bequest gift. The donor includes the charity because of the donor's people, values, and history. But this doesn't give a reason for making a gift *of a specific size*. It doesn't motivate the *large* bequest gift over the small one. To do that, we must define a victory.

Victory preface examples: Define a victory

Increasing the *size* of a planned bequest starts with victory. The donor can define a personally

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[67] *See* James, R. N., III. III. (2020). American charitable bequest transfers across the centuries: Empirical findings and implications for policy and practice. *Estate Planning and Community Property Law Journal, 12*, 235-285. p. 280. citing to Joulfaian, D. (2019). *The federal estate tax: History, law, and economics*. The MIT Press. p. 83.

meaningful victory. This can begin with a question like,

- "Tell me, 'What you would like to accomplish with your gift?'"
- "Have you ever thought about how you would like your gift to be used?"[68]

These questions lead to conversations about impact. For example, we might continue,

> "The reason I ask is this. I was working with another donor; you remind me of him. You both have a real heart for this cause." *[This references Identity.]*
>
> "He decided to create a permanent endowment for a scholarship / lectureship / professorship / our __ operations. It will ... [here describe the impact]." *[This defines a Victory.]*
>
> "This will come from a $____ gift in his will. Would that type of gift appeal to you?" *[This presents a Challenge.]*

The donor's reactions then guide the conversation. If the example gift is too large, their reaction will show this. We can then describe a smaller gift option. If the area of impact isn't compelling, their reaction will show this. We can then discuss what area would be a better fit. The process

[68] Lumpkin, S. & Comfort, J. (2018, August 23). *How to have the MOST productive conversations: From here to eternity...* [Paper presentation]. Colorado Planned Giving Roundtable, 30th Annual Summer Symposium, Denver, CO.

helps the donor construct a personally meaningful victory.

When a larger gift creates a specific, lasting, meaningful victory, it makes sense. Otherwise, it doesn't. For real money, the charity must offer real value. It must deliver real victory. Ideally, it offers symbolic immortality.

Victory preface external competition

Every charity has competition. This may include older, more established charities. But mostly, it's the private family foundation.

In philanthropy, the most powerful permanent expression of identity is the private family foundation. It lives forever. It follows the donor's values and rules forever. It's typically named for the donor or the donor's family. For estates over $5 million, 78% of charitable bequest dollars go to private family foundations.[69]

Let that sink in. Public charities get only 22% of charitable bequest dollars from estates over $5 million. Charities are losing the battle. Many don't know they're even in a battle to start with. Many aren't even trying to compete.

[69] Raub, B. G. & Newcomb, J. (2011, Summer). Federal estate tax returns filed for 2007 decedents, *Statistics of Income Bulletin, 31*, 182-213, 191. https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-soi/11essumbulestatereturns.pdf

Victory preface internal barriers

Charities are losing to private family foundations. One reason is that few are even *trying* to provide value to legacy donors. They aren't offering *any* victory, much less a permanent one. Charity managers often resist doing this. Their attitude might sound like the following:

> "Deliver value to legacy donors? No, no, no. The donor's job is to deliver value to us! Besides, that just turns unrestricted money into restricted!"

Helping a donor define a meaningful victory works. It makes the gift larger. But charity managers don't like donor instructions. How can we convince them?

One way is to point to the competition. For example, we might say,

> "The donor wants to put these instructions with their money. They can use a private family foundation. They can use the community foundation. But I would rather they gave it directly to us to manage. What do you think?"

Or justify donor conversations as "risk management." They avoid future problems. For example,

> "I ask legacy donors what they want to accomplish with their gift. That way I can learn if they're going to put any instructions in their wills. Sometimes those instructions are a

problem. If we don't learn about it until after they die, we might have to reject the gift. We just lose that money. But if we can talk about their plans in advance, then we can agree on some feasible option."

Delivering victory becomes "managing risk." Or it becomes "managing competition." Either way, the goal is to translate. We want to deliver a powerful victory for the donor. But we need the charity manager on board as well.

Conclusion

There isn't just one magic phrase. Instead, there are unlimited expressions of the magic ideas. A compelling ask connects the donor's

Original Identity → Challenge → Victory → Enhanced Identity

A compelling estate ask also does this. And it considers both avoidance and symbolic immortality. Remember these core principles. Then, choose whatever phrase you like best. But you *can* do it. You can ask for the gift in a will!

Postscript
The 4S method: Stacking it all together

We've looked at the theory. We've look at the phrases. Hopefully, you've found something that feels right for you. But what if you haven't? What if you're still nervous about all this? Let me end with the easiest, softest, but still highly effective method. It's my favorite. Anyone can do it.

I like to call it the 4S method.[70] That stands for 3 Stories then Shut up. At some point in a conversation, it's common to give the donor an update. Suppose, for example, an alumnus asked, "What's new at Texas Tech?" I might respond by mentioning a new coach. Then, I might mention a new building. Then, I might say,

> Oh, and Jon Smith did a neat thing. Did you know Jon? He graduated two years before you. No? Well, Jon spent his career helping other people get their finances in order. And he recently signed a new will that one day will endow a permanent scholarship for our financial planning students!

And then, I take a drink. Silence. Wait for a response. If the donor wants to pick up this conversation, he can do so. If he doesn't, I could choose to then move up the list of asking phrases. But even if I don't, just sharing this little story is powerful.

Notice the details here. It's the third story. (We don't "lead with death.") It's about someone like the donor. (It shows that "people like you do things like this.") The gift reflects that person's life story.

[70] This suggestion originated from Jeff Comfort, Vice President, Principal Gifts and Gift Planning, Oregon State University. Comfort, J. (2014, May 29). *Lessons learned.* [Conference presentation]. Western Regional Planned Giving Conference. Costa Mesa, CA.

(It's an expression of identity.) The gift makes a permanent impact. (Their identity "lives on.") The details match both avoidance and symbolic immortality.

This works. It's not just a matter of speculation. I've tested many approaches to increase interest in a charitable bequest. The most powerful was this one. Share examples of other living donors whose estate gifts reflect their life stories.[71] This brief story does that. It does so even if the conversation then moves in a different direction.

Of course, the details of the story can change. The person need not have graduated near the same time. They might be similar in some other way. Or you might simply say, "You remind me of another donor; he …" It might be a story of someone you know. It might be someone you only heard about. But as long as it incorporates the underlying principles, the story can be powerful.

Asking for a bequest gift can be scary. But anyone can learn to share three stories and then shut up!

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[71] *See* James, R. N., III, & Routley, C. (2016). We the living: the effects of living and deceased donor stories on charitable bequest giving intentions. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 21*(2), 109-117. Unpublished results from this same study showed that these "living donor stories" were significantly more effective than other messages such as statistical evidence indicating the people agreed with the practice of including a charitable gift in a will or evidence of heirs tendency to quickly spend inheritances.

12

SOCRATIC FUNDRAISING IN BULK: DONOR SURVEYS THAT WORK

Socratic fundraising asks questions. It's easy to think of this as face-to-face, one-on-one conversations. But sometimes that isn't feasible. The right personnel aren't available. Or their time is too expensive for the gift size. Or donors don't want to meet. Or there are too many donors to meet. Or they're too far away.

Socratic fundraising can still work. It's still possible to ask questions. Questions can arise in

- Donor telephone conversations (one-on-one but not face-to-face)
- Donor focus groups (face-to-face but not one-on-one), or
- Donor surveys (neither one-on-one nor face-to-face).

Steps

In all these formats, the steps are similar. The universal steps for a compelling donor experience are

Original Identity → Challenge → Victory → Enhanced Identity

Socratic fundraising guides the donor through these steps.[1] First, the fundraiser must have a valid reason to ask questions. This then permits questions that

- Connect the donor's identity (history, people, and values) with the cause, the charity, or the project [*Original Identity → Challenge*]
- Define a personally meaningful victory [*Victory → Enhanced Identity*], and
- Make a challenge that promises the victory [*Challenge → Victory*].

Justify asking questions

Questions can work. But questions won't work if people won't answer. The donor must

- Return the survey
- Attend the focus group, or

[1] This enhanced identity can be either private (meaning) or public (reputation). This process also reflects the steps in the monomyth or universal hero story. For a description connecting these steps to Campbell, J. (1949/2004). *The hero with a thousand faces* (commemorative ed.). Princeton University Press. p. 28. *See* footnote 3 in Chapter 1. Socratic fundraising theory: How questions advance the story.

- Continue the phone conversation.

So, we need to justify asking the questions. Reasons can include,

- "I need your help or advice." This might be because
    - "I'm new here."
    - "We have a problem."
    - "We have an idea."
    - "You're in charge."
    - "You're important."
- The reverse is "I can help or advise you."
- Another is "I'm interested in your story."

Legitimate reasons

If you don't care what donors think, don't ask. It's important to have a legitimate reason to ask.[2] It's also important that reasons *appear* legitimate. So,

[2] In one experiment, explaining that asking people to sign a petition was, ultimately, just a way to get either customers (for-profit) or donations (nonprofit) had little impact on the rating of for-profit organizations. But it dramatically decreased the morality rating of nonprofit organizations. The researchers explained, "nonprofit organizations are condemned more drastically for using a deceptive recruitment technique than are for-profit organizations." [Greitemeyer, T., & Sagioglou, C. (2018). When positive ends tarnish the means: The morality of nonprofit more than of for-profit organizations is tainted by the use of compliance techniques. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 76, 67-75.] Thus, it is important for nonprofit organizations to make sure that inquiries and requests are truly legitimate, separate from any behavioral effects on donors.

beware of adding a donation request to a survey.[3] This can appear as,

> "We need your advice … Oh, but now that you're giving advice, we actually want your money."

Donors can feel,

> "You didn't care what I thought. You just wanted fast cash."

Also, never ask a question with a forced answer. For example, don't ask

> "Should we continue our award-winning work that is transforming the lives of so many in desperate need?"

This might sound great to charity insiders. But it de-legitimizes the questions. Donors can feel,

> "You didn't care what I thought. You just wanted to brag."

Effective questions must be – and appear – legitimate.

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[3] This is different than adding a question or two on an appeal letter response card. That approach says, "Since you are giving, please tell us what you think." That is different than, "We need your advice… Oh, and now that you've given your advice, we also want your money." This second approach undermines the credibility of the justification for asking the questions. The first doesn't.

Connect with original identity

Questions can connect the donor's identity with the cause, the charity, or the project. This can start even before the first question. The reason for asking the questions can be *because of* the donor's identity.[4] For example,

> "Your insight is especially important because we need input from …"

- Women
- Baby boomers
- Loyal donors
- Alumni from the 80s
- Those who have supported us in the past, but not in the last year
- People who care about ________ [insert specific aspect of the charity]

The questions themselves then further connect with the donor's identity. This means connecting with the donor's

- Values
- People, or

[4] Tom Ahern and Simone Joyaux mention this in the context of focus groups. They write, "Conduct focus groups with donors every year. If you wish, consider different donor groupings based on donor affinities: gender and generation, interests within your organization, lifestyle, and so on. How about trying focus groups with lapsed donors?" Ahern, T., & Joyaux, S. P. (2011). *Keep your donors: The guide to better communications & stronger relationships.* John Wiley & Sons. p. 138.

- Life story.

What does this look like? What are some actual questions? It depends on the cause. Let's look at some examples for an environmental charity.

Values identity questions: Examples

Here is an example of questions asking about donors' values.

Please rate the importance to you of the following:

[Values options (row headings)]

Being a good example for the next generation.

Making a lasting impact in the world.

Ensuring that your values will be remembered by future generations.

[Response options (column headings)]

___ Highly important

___ Somewhat important

___ Slightly important

___ Not important

Values identity questions: Comments

Environmental causes improve the future of the planet. These questions ask about related values. They elicit connections with these values.

Do such reminders work? One experiment tested this. Some people wrote a short essay. Others didn't. The essay was on what they wanted to be remembered for by future generations.[5] Writing about this increased donations to an environmental charity by 45%.[6]

Of course, other causes may focus on other values. In experiments, reminders of values such as love[7] or religious beliefs[8] also increase donations. Use the values relevant for your cause.

Sometimes, these values responses can be surprising. One charity focused on women's reproductive rights in the developing world. Leaders assumed the key value was women's rights. Survey results revealed something else. Many donors cared only about population control.

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[5] Zaval, L., Markowitz, E. M., & Weber, E. U. (2015). How will I be remembered? Conserving the environment for the sake of one's legacy. *Psychological Science, 26*(2), 231-236.

[6] Without the essay, 61% donated from a $10 bonus ($2.31 average gift). With the essay, 70% donated from a $10 bonus ($3.34 average gift). Combined, this was a 45% increase in dollars donated. Zaval, L., Markowitz, E. M., & Weber, E. U. (2015). How will I be remembered? Conserving the environment for the sake of one's legacy. *Psychological Science, 26*(2), 231-236, 234.

[7] Gueguen, N., & Lamy, L. (2011). The effect of the word "love" on compliance to a request for humanitarian aid: An evaluation in a field setting. *Social Influence, 6*(4), 249-258.

[8] Shariff, A. F., & Norenzayan, A. (2007). God is watching you: Priming God concepts increases prosocial behavior in an anonymous economic game. *Psychological Science*, 18(9), 803-809.

Life story identity questions: Examples

Here is an example of questions asking about donors' life story connections.

At what age did you first begin to think about the importance of conserving the natural environment?

__ In childhood

__ In high school

__ In my 20s

__ In my 30s or later

Comments:

Which of the following have been important in your life? (Check any that apply.)

___ Time I have spent outdoors

___ Time I have spent on a river

___ Time I have spent in a forest

___ Time I have spent on a lake

___ My life experiences with wildlife

___ My life experiences with wild birds

___ My life experiences with trees and plants

Comments:

When did you first learn about [this charity]?[9]

___ Within the last year

___ Within the last five years

___ Within the last ten years

___ More than ten years ago

Life story identity questions: Comments

These questions ask about the donor's life story. They connect it with the cause or the charity. This encourages support. One experiment used the first two sets of questions.[10] These questions worked. They increased donation likelihood for an environmental charity.

These life story questions worked for current gifts. But they were the most effective for bequest gifts.[11] Other research matches this. Donors report that life story connections are key for charitable bequests.[12] Neuroimaging shows such decisions engage "visualized autobiography" brain regions.[13] As this visualization increases, so does interest in a bequest. One study tested phrases to describe a

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[9] *See*, e.g., "How did you hear about our organization?" as a survey suggestion in Alexander, G. D. & Carlson, K. J. (2005). *Essential principles for fundraising success: An answer manual for the everyday challenges of raising money.* Jossey-Bass. pp. 174-175.

[10] James, R. N., III. (2016, March 7). *Using biasing questions in charitable bequest surveys.* Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2744006

[11] *Id.*

[12] Routley, C., & Sargeant, A. (2015). Leaving a bequest: Living on through charitable gifts. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 44*(5), 869-885.

[13] James, R. N., III., & O'Boyle, M. W. (2014). Charitable estate planning as visualized autobiography: An fMRI study of its neural correlates. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 43*(2), 355-373.

charitable bequest gift.[14] The best added, "to support causes that have been important in your life." Life story references are powerful for bequest gifts.

These questions can help in other ways. They're a great starting point for conversations. ("Tell me more …") They can also reveal key messages. For example, donations were most likely for those noting "life experiences with wild birds." They were least likely for those referencing time "spent on a lake." Such details might inform project or image choices for fundraising messages.

People identity questions: Examples

Here is an example of questions asking about donors' people connections.

> Do you have more or less than two family members who consider conserving the natural environment to be important?
>
> ___ About 2
>
> ___ More than 2
>
> ___ Less than 2
>
> Were there any family members in your life who were particularly influential in shaping your views on the importance of nature conservation? (Check any that apply.)

[14] James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(2), 998-1011.

___ Grandmother ___Grandfather ___ Aunt
___Uncle ___Mother ___Father ___Sibling
___Other family member

Comments:

We love to recognize our outstanding team members at [this charity]! Please share any memorable experiences you've had with anyone you've met at [this charity].
Comments:

People identity questions: Comments

The first two questions ask about family member connections. This can help link the donor's identity with the cause. This also sets up a later question. It asks about a gift in a will honoring a family member.

The third question recalls experiences with people at the charity. For different charities, these will be different people. At universities, these might be professors. At hospitals, these might be doctors or nurses. Answers to "people" questions also make great conversation starters. ("Tell me more …")

The questions often omit strong negative answers. This is intentional. The goal is to connect donors to the cause. If some connection is absent, we don't want them to focus on that. We don't want them to commit to a strong negative answer.

One approach is to group everything negative into a moderate response. Thus, the most negative answer might be "probably not" or "unlikely." This leaves out "definitely not" or "never." In the first question, the lowest group is "less than 2." This omits the "none" response.

A prior question used a similar grouping strategy. It asked, "When did you first learn about [this charity]?" Answer options included within the last year, five years, and ten years. Notice, these aren't exclusive categories. A date within the last year is also within the last ten years. Uncertainty nudges towards the safer answer. The safer answer reports a longer connection range. This can make the relationship time feel longer. It strengthens the identity connection.

Victory questions: Examples

Here is an example of questions asking donors to define their victory.

> On a scale from 0 = Absolutely no importance to 100 = Absolutely the greatest importance, please rate the importance of the work of [this charity] in the following areas
>
> ____ Environmental conservation
>
> ____ Preserve wetlands for wild ducks and other migrating birds
>
> ____ Protect and restore ancient sequoia and redwood forests in the U.S.

____ Protect sensitive coral reefs around the globe

Victory questions: Comments

The next step is to help the donor define a personally meaningful victory. One way to do this is with a "victory menu." The menu lists different projects or impact areas. Donors rate the importance of each. This reveals which is most meaningful to the donor. It helps the donor define his ideal victory. This encourages giving.

One experiment tested this for ten charities from five causes.[15] Each cause included a charity with three projects. The average likelihood of giving for each charity was

- 14% when reading about causes
- 15% when reading about causes and projects
- 19% when rating the importance of causes
- 21% when rating the importance of causes and projects

This test included the questions from the previous example. These worked for environmental charities. For The Nature Conservancy, donation likelihood was

- 11% when reading about causes

[15] James, R. N., III. (2018). Increasing charitable donation intentions with preliminary importance ratings. *International Review of Public and Nonprofit Marketing, 15*(3), 393-411.

- 12% when reading about causes and projects
- 15% when rating causes
- 18% when rating causes and projects

The questions also worked for World Wildlife Fund. Giving likelihood was 13% when reading about causes or causes and projects. It was 16% when rating causes. It was 19% when rating causes and projects.[16]

Another experiment explored how to get the "rich and powerful" to give.[17] Alumni mailings went to two groups. One had response cards with this statement:

> "Annual alumni giving through the Penn Fund directly supports these priorities of undergraduate education.
>
> ☑ Student financial aid
>
> ☑ Student and academic life
>
> ☑ Residential life
>
> ☑ Special campus initiatives"

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[16] This result was similar, but one important aspect was different. The projects were described as projects of the first charity – The Nature Conservancy. Yet, asking for opinons about each project still increased willingness to donate to World Wildlife Fund. The questions appeared to increase interest in supporting the underlying cause. This increased interest in supporting both the charity operating the specific projects rated and a similar charity presumably operating similar projects.

[17] Kessler, J. B., Milkman, K. L., & Zhang, C. Y. (2019). Getting the rich and powerful to give. *Management Science, 65*(9), 4049-4062.

The other's response cards instead asked a question. They removed the checks from the boxes and added,

> "Tell us which is most important to you.
> (Please check one box)"

The "rich" were those from the wealthiest census tracts. Among the "rich" sending a gift, the average size was $192 for the first response card. It was $463 for the second. The "powerful" were those listed as being on a firm's board of directors. Among the "powerful" sending a gift, the average size was $158 for the first response card. It was $714 for the second.[18]

Asking for opinions in other ways can also work. For example, giving people the chance to vote on a project works. In experiments, this increases subsequent volunteering[19] and donations.[20]

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[18] In this study the variation in the response card had little effect on the likelihood of a donation. This makes sense because a person who was not donating would be unlikely to read or answer a question on the appeal letter response card. This would limit the question's ability to influence the decision to donate or not. Thus, in this experiment it is likely that only those who were donating actually received the "treatment" of answering questions. The average gift size among those donating who were not in the "rich" or "powerful" categories was $235 for the statement group and $286 for the question group. Total letter recipients were: 16,031 (question group not rich or powerful), 16,143 (statement group not rich or powerful), 766 (question group rich), 843 (statement group powerful), 582 (question group powerful), and 595 (statement group powerful). *See* Kessler, J. B., Milkman, K. L., & Zhang, C. Y. (2019). Getting the rich and powerful to give. *Management Science, 65*(9), 4049-4062, Table 1.

[19] Mertins, V., & Walter, C. (2021). In absence of money: a field experiment on volunteer work motivation. *Experimental Economics*, 1-33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10683-020-09686-4

[20] Zarghamee, H. S., Messer, K. D., Fooks, J. R., Schulze, W. D., Wu, S., & Yan, J. (2017). Nudging charitable giving: Three field experiments. *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics, 66*, 137-149.

In fundraising, "victory" is about the impact of a gift. Describing a potential victory as important can help. But asking works better than telling. By answering, the donor can personally commit to the importance of the victory. The donor can take ownership. This can turn *a* victory into *the donor's* victory. It can help connect the *victory* with the donor's *identity*.

Challenge questions: Theory

In Socratic fundraising, the final step is making the ask. This is the challenge that promises a victory.[21] [*Challenge → Victory*]. But there's a problem. A survey isn't going to ask for an immediate donation. (Doing this can de-legitimize the questions.)

The immediate goal isn't to get the donor to *make* a gift. But it's related. The goal is to get the donor to *predict* a gift. A prediction is still just an opinion. The question is still in the realm of opinion gathering. But asking for a prediction is surprisingly powerful.

Academic research calls it the "Question-Behavior Effect" (QBE). The idea is this: Suppose we ask a person to *do* some pro-social act. It might be donating, volunteering, giving blood, voting, recycling, etc. That decision requires a tradeoff.

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[21] Also known as the "call to adventure" in the monomyth (universal hero story) or the "inciting incident" in a general narrative structure.

- Paying the cost gets positive identity effects. (It affirms, "I am the type of person who gives, volunteers, recycles, etc.")
- Avoiding the cost gets negative identity effects. (It suggests, "I am not that type of person.")

Now suppose instead we ask a person to *predict* if they will act. Predicting the behavior also has positive identity effects. (It affirms, "I am the type of person who gives, volunteers, recycles, etc.") But a prediction is free. It's not a contract. It requires no effort. There's no cost.

What happens? People are less likely to *act* pro-socially than to *predict* they will act pro-socially. That's no surprise. The surprise is this: *Once* people *predict* they will act, they then change their future behavior. They change it to match their prediction. The result? Asking for the prediction first increases pro-social behavior. In experiments, this works with

- Blood donations[22]
- Volunteering[23]

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[22] Godin, G., Germain, M., Conner, M., Delage, G., & Sheeran, P. (2014). Promoting the return of lapsed blood donors: A seven-arm randomized controlled trial of the question–behavior effect. *Health Psychology, 33*(7), 646-655; Godin, G., Sheeran, P., Conner, M., & Germain, M. (2008). Asking questions changes behavior: Mere measurement effects on frequency of blood donation. *Health Psychology, 27*(2), 179-184.

[23] Sherman, S. J. (1980). On the self-erasing nature of errors of prediction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39*(2), 211-221; Spangenberg, E. R., Sprott, D. E., Grohmann, B., & Smith, R. J. (2003). Mass-communicated prediction requests: Practical application and a cognitive dissonance explanation for self-prophecy. *Journal of Marketing, 67*(3), 47-62.

- Voting[24]
- Recycling,[25] and
- Buying environmentally friendly products.[26]

It also works with donations.[27] One experiment asked for this prediction:

> "If you were contacted by your high school or college and asked to donate money, would you do so?"

Asking this a few days before a fundraising request worked. The share of those donating to their college increased by half.[28]

Another experiment asked some people a different question. It asked how much they would "hypothetically" donate to a project. Asking this increased actual donations later. Gifts went up 43% for a project helping turtles. They went up 25% for one helping elephants.[29]

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[24] Greenwald, A. G., Carnot, C. G., Beach, R., & Young, B. (1987). Increasing voting behavior by asking people if they expect to vote. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 72*(2), 315-318.
[25] Sprott, D. E., Spangenberg, E. R., & Perkins, A. W. (1999). Two more self-prophecy experiments. In E. J. Arnould & L. M. Scott (Eds.), *NA - Advances in Consumer Research: Vol. 26* (pp. 621-626). Association for Consumer Research.
[26] Bodur, H. O., Duval, K. M., & Grohmann, B. (2015). Will you purchase environmentally friendly products? Using prediction requests to increase choice of sustainable products. *Journal of Business Ethics, 129*(1), 59-75.
[27] Obermiller, C., & Spangenberg, E. (2000). Improving telephone fundraising by use of self-prophecy. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 5*(4), 365-372.
[28] *Id.*
[29] Johansson-Stenman, O., & Svedsäter, H. (2008). Measuring hypothetical bias in choice experiments: the importance of cognitive consistency. *The BE Journal*

QBE shows that people tend to change their behavior to match their predictions. This matters for survey questions. The survey goal is not just to get a donation prediction. It's also to get a *positive* prediction.

The lead-up questions can help.[30] They can connect the donor's history, people, and values with the cause, the charity, or the project. They can help the donor define a personally meaningful victory. These steps help increase the subsequent gift prediction. Thus, the gift prediction should come towards the *end* of the survey.[31] It's the punchline!

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of Economic Analysis & Policy, 8(1), 1-10, 6. ("The MWTP [Marginal Willingness to Pay] for the Elephant-Campaign is 25% and 70% larger in the real-after-hypothetical and hypothetical treatments, respectively, than in the real-directly treatment. For the Turtle-Campaign, the corresponding MWTPs are 43% and 87% larger.")

[30] The idea behind most of these survey questions is actually similar. People first express an opinion about the cause, the charity, the project or associated values, history, or people. This might be an importance rating, a vote, a "hypothetical" gift, or a gift prediction. But the key is this: The opinion about the pro-social project, cause, charity, or act is given in a *cost-free* environment. It is just an opinion or maybe a guess. It's not a contract. This cost-free environment creates more pro-social opinions. Later, people can choose to match their opinions with behavior. But because they've already stated an opinion, their behavior changes. It changes to make their behavior consistent with their previously stated opinion. The most powerful opinion is the prediction. It's the most powerful because it's the most closely tied to the target behavior – making a gift.

[31] Starting with giving prediction questions for various projects reduced the predicted likelihood of a gift compared with starting with opinion questions about those projects prior to making the gift prediction in James, R. N., III. (2018). Increasing charitable donation intentions with preliminary importance ratings. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing, 15*(3), 393-411.

Challenge questions: Examples

Here is an example of questions asking about the challenge (i.e., the gift).

Many people who care about this cause like to give in different ways. How likely is it that you would consider any of the following gifts in the next six months?

[Gift options (row headings)]

Gift by volunteering time

Gift by check or credit card

Gift as an automatic monthly withdrawal

Gift in a will (if you happened to sign a new will)

Gift in a will in honor or memory of a loved one

Gift that pays you income for life

Gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds that avoids taxes

Gift of real estate that avoids capital gains taxes

Gift from an IRA/401(k) that avoids income taxes

[Response options (column headings)]

___ Definitely

___ Somewhat likely

___ Unlikely

___ Have already done so

___ Would like more info

Challenge questions: Comments

Why this wording? Why this sequence? Let's unpack the details. The question begins with a "social norm" statement.

> "Many people who care about this cause like to give in different ways."

In charitable giving experiments, stating that others also give is powerful. Adding that they "like to" do it is even more powerful.[32] Adding that they "care about" the cause helps, too.[33] This uses social-emotional language. Such language encourages sharing.[34] It also shows these other people are like the donor. (The donor cares about the cause, too.) It delivers a powerful fundraising message. It implies,

> "People like me do things like this."

The next part asks for a prediction. It asks,

> "How likely is it that you would consider any of the following gifts in the next six months?"

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[32] *See* B2 v B3 in Table 1 at p. 1002 for the effects of adding/removing "like to" in a social norm statement when asking about charitable bequest intentions in James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(2), 998-1011.

[33] See B4 v B3 in Table 1 at p. 1002 for the effects of adding/remove "care about" in a social norm statement when asking about charitable bequest intentions in James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 27*(2), 998-1011.

[34] *See* Book I in this series: *The Storytelling Fundraiser: The Brain, Behavioral Economics, and Fundraising Story.* Chapter 4: "Math problems in fundraising story: Motivations & barriers" and Chapter 5: "Solutions in fundraising math: Story first, math second".

The question predicts likelihood. In experiments, asking, "how likely is it that you will do X" works.[35] It influences behavior more than asking if a person "intends to" act.[36] Why? Failing to act makes a positive prediction wrong. But it doesn't necessarily contradict a statement about intentions. Predictions are more powerful than intentions.

But this prediction is still a soft, safe, "no obligation" question. A positive answer doesn't cost anything. It doesn't risk anything. The question just asks for thoughts. It's even softer because it asks what the donor "might consider." The longer time horizon softens the question even more. Yet, six months is still soon enough to warrant a follow-up contact.

Challenge options: Volunteering

The challenge question uses a long list of gift options. It starts with volunteering. Why? Of course, it's possible the charity needs volunteers. (And people who volunteer are more likely to donate.) But there's another reason. Asking about intentions to volunteer increases willingness to donate. In one experiment, first asking about volunteering led to a 50% increase

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[35] Armitage, C. J., Norman, P., Alganem, S., & Conner, M. (2015). Expectations are more predictive of behavior than behavioral intentions: Evidence from two prospective studies. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine, 49*(2), 239-246, 240.
[36] Notice that "intend to" is a statement about a current state. It can still be accurate, even if the person doesn't later engage in the future act. In contrast, the accuracy of a prediction of future behavior depends entirely upon the future act occurring or not.

in donation intentions.[37] Asking about giving *time* triggers a more social-emotional mindset.[38] This mindset encourages donations. Leading with the volunteering question nudges people. It nudges them to predict future donations.

Challenge options: Check, credit card, automatic withdrawal

The next question references the most common gifts – check or credit card. This helps ease into the later – more exotic – gifts. It groups all the gifts together. They're all just "ways to give."

Donors can confidently check this box. (This is a *donor* survey, after all.) By doing so, the donor puts himself in the category. He is the kind of person who makes gifts like these.

The next question moves to the simplest upgrade – the monthly donor. Any indication of interest can trigger a follow up contact.[39]

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[37] *See* Experiment 1 in Liu, W., & Aaker, J. (2008). The happiness of giving: The time-ask effect. *Journal of Consumer Research, 35*(3), 543-557. (Average responses to "How much money would you donate to the American Lung Cancer Foundation?" increased 49% from $24.46 to $36.44 when participants were first asked "How much time would you like to donate to the American Lung Cancer Foundation?")

[38] *See* Experiment 2 in Liu, W., & Aaker, J. (2008). The happiness of giving: The time-ask effect. *Journal of Consumer Research, 35*(3), 543-557.

[39] For some great examples, see *The Monthly Giving Communications Template Kit* by DonorPerfect at https://uploads.donorperfect.com/pdf/monthly-giving-template-kit.pdf

Challenge options: Bequest

Asking about estate plans is tricky. Using "death" words is dangerous.[40] It reduces interest in estate gifts and other transactions.[41] Messages that "lead with death" tend to have low response rates.

One charity I worked with had sent an appeal letter asking for gifts in wills. The letter very strongly led with death. The response card included only questions about estate planning. Sending 30,000 of these letters resulted in no responses.

Later, the same charity sent a brief survey. It included the same types of questions near the end. Again, the questions asked about gifts in wills. But this time the charity got a 22% response rate. A year later, they re-sent to the non-responders. They got another 18% response rate from this group. Leading with death failed. But "burying" the "death" question at the end of a survey worked.

The survey does this here. It "buries" the "death" question. The list *starts* with the most familiar ways to give. The estate gift is in *the middle* of the list. It's worded the same as every other gift.

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[40] *See* Chapter 11: Socratic fundraising "legacy edition": How to ask for the gift in a will without fear or anxiety.

[41] James, R. N., III. (2016). An economic model of mortality salience in personal financial decision making: Applications to annuities, life insurance, charitable gifts, estate planning, conspicuous consumption, and healthcare. *Journal of Financial Therapy, 7(*2), 62-82; James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 27*(2), 998-1011; Salisbury, L. C., & Nenkov, G. Y. (2016). Solving the annuity puzzle: The role of mortality salience in retirement savings decumulation decisions. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 26*(3), 417-425.

It's just another way to give. It uses the simplest, friendliest language.[42] The question is softened further by making it hypothetical. It adds, "(if you happened to sign a new will)."

If the survey is focused on estate gifts, earlier phrasing can be adjusted. In estate giving, nothing is more attractive than permanence. One experiment compared describing a charity as either

- "Meeting the immediate needs of people," or
- "Creating lasting improvements that would benefit people in the future."

The first description normally worked better. But for people reminded of their death, the second did. For them, it led to twice as much giving.[43] In a death context, permanence language works.

Another experiment found this for memorial donations. Adding a permanence goal worked best.[44] Death reminders trigger this desire for permanence.

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[42] "Gift in a will" generates more interest than "estate gift" or "legacy gift" or "bequest gift." *See* James, R. N., III. (2018). Creating understanding and interest in charitable financial and estate planning: An experimental test of introductory phrases. *Journal of Personal Finance, 17*(2), 9-21; James, R. N., III. (2016). Phrasing the charitable bequest inquiry. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(2), 998-1011.
[43] Wade-Benzoni, K. A., Tost, L. P., Hernandez, M., & Larrick, R. P. (2012). It's only a matter of time: Death, legacies, and intergenerational decisions. *Psychological Science, 23*(7), 704-709.
[44] James, R. N., III. (2019). Encouraging repeated memorial donations to a scholarship fund: An experimental test of permanence goals and anniversary acknowledgements. *Philanthropy & Education, 2*(2), 1-28.

If encouraging estate gifts is the goal, permanence helps. The survey words can be adjusted to match. For example, in a project or cause description, the word "protect" might become

- "Lasting protection"
- "Permanently protect"
- "Protect forever," or
- "Protect for future generations."

Challenge options: Memorial bequest and income gifts

The next question asks about the memorial gift in a will. In one experiment, asking this question worked. It increased interest in an estate gift for about one out of four people.[45]

This shows another function of a survey. It can teach. The gift idea might be new. It might never have occurred to the donor before. A donor might think this:

> "I didn't know I could make a bequest gift in honor of a loved one."

[45] Unpublished results from an online survey conducted by author in November of 2014. After reporting interest in making any gift to charity in a will, respondents were then asked a second question. Some were asked to report interest in, "Honor a family member by making a memorial gift to charity in my will." 24% (119 of 504) reported greater interest in this second gift than in the first. Others were asked to report interest in "Honor a family member by making a tribute gift to charity in my will." 29% (147 of 505) reported greater interest in this second gift than in the first.

A survey can introduce other charitable options. It can ask about

- A "gift that pays you income for life,"[46]
- A gift of inheritance rights (house or farmland) with an immediate income tax deduction,[47]
- A named scholarship fund,
- A lectureship,
- An endowed professorship,
- A virtual endowment,[48]
- Or any other attractive giving opportunity.

In each case, a question introduces the idea. If it piques curiosity, the donor responds positively. This can lead to valuable conversations.

Challenge options: IRA Gifts

The last question asks about a

"Gift from an IRA that avoids income taxes."

This question can do different things for different donors. First, it is a stealth estate giving question.

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[46] This refers to a charitable gift annuity or charitable remainder trust. For tests on this exact wording, *see* James, R. N., III. (2018). Describing complex charitable giving instruments: Experimental tests of technical finance terms and tax benefits. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 28*(4), 437-452.
[47] This refers to a retained life estate.
[48] When a current gift to fund an endowment is too large for the donor, a virtual endowment might work. This combines annual gifts for the endowment payout plus a sinking fund (eventually fully funding the endowment) with a "back up" estate gift that ensures funding in the event of death.

Heirs inheriting IRA money must pay income taxes on it. (This is true for any size estate.) But any part left to charity avoids these taxes.[49] The question response can give permission for this conversation. Adding this estate gift is easy. It can typically be done online.

For donors over age 70½, another option arises. They can make current gifts directly from their IRA.[50] This money is earned income. But it has never been taxed. If it's donated, it never will be. For donors over age 72, these gifts do more. They reduce required distributions that otherwise create taxes.

Challenge options: Gifts of assets

The final three questions lead with value. They reference the tax benefit. This phrasing works in experiments. In one, only 14% were "interested now" in pursuing a gift described as,

[49] Occasionally a financial advisor might give mistaken information about the effects of adding a charity as a beneficiary to an IRA or 401(k). Charities are not "designated beneficiaries," so adding them could accelerate required minimum distributions for other beneficiaries. However, there are so many solutions to this issue that it isn't functionally a problem at all. For example, this doesn't apply so long as the charity's share is paid out before September 30 of the year following the year of the participant's death. Treas. Reg. sec. 1.401(a)(9)-4 Q&A 4(a). Alternatively, the rule doesn't apply if the different beneficiaries separate their accounts by end of year following the participant's death. Treas. Reg. sec. 1.401(a)(9)-8 Q&A 2(a). Or, if the spouse is a beneficiary, that part can be simply rolled into spouse's IRA. Finally, if the concern is great enough, the IRAs can be separated into a 100% charitable and 100% non-charitable account before death. This last approach allows distributions to be taken from either account to match estate planning goals.

[50] This is called a qualified charitable distribution. For those who have a 401(k) plan, the money is first moved into an IRA rollover which then permits these gifts.

> "Make a gift of stocks or bonds to charity."[51]

This increased to 20% when it was described as,

> "Avoid capital gains tax by making a gift of stocks or bonds to charity"

With this phrasing, people were more interested in giving. They're also more likely to want to learn more.

What do people want to read about on their favorite charity's website? One study of over 5,000 people asked this question. The share who were "definitely" or "might be" interested in reading more was,[52]

- 16% for "Giving stocks"
- 16% for "Giving stocks, bonds, or real estate"
- 24% for "Avoiding capital gains taxes by giving stocks"
- 28% for "Avoiding taxes by giving stocks"

Leading with value works. Simple words work.

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[51] James, R. N., III. (2018). Describing complex charitable giving instruments: Experimental tests of technical finance terms and tax benefits. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 28*(4), 437-452, 447.

[52] Unpublished results from online survey by the author. The introductory question text was "Suppose you are viewing the website of a charity representing a cause that is important in your life. In addition to a 'Donate Now' button, the following buttons appear on the website. Please rate your level of interest in clicking on the button to read the corresponding information. (Note: after answering this set of question, you will be asked to read information about one of these topics, so please more highly rate the ones you are actually interested in.)"

Asset gift questions can be powerful in other ways. They can reveal capacity. A person wanting information about gifts of real estate likely owns real estate. The same is true for stocks, bonds, or any listed assets. These questions also imply that making such gifts is common. This supports a social norm of giving assets.

Just thinking about these questions is powerful. It can change the reference point for a gift. A cash donation tends to be compared with other regular cash expenditures from disposable income. This is a small reference point.

A donation of stocks tends to be compared with stock holdings. This is a large reference point. The same idea applies to IRA gifts, real estate gifts, and estate gifts. These are not gifts from disposable income. These are gifts of wealth.

Wealth is a large reference point. It makes a large gift feel more reasonable. Thinking about such gifts can change a donor's "mental accounting." It can make wealth "donation relevant."[53]

Challenge answers

The column headings give the answer options. Notice, something is missing. There isn't a hard "no" option. The most negative option is, "Unlikely."

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[53] *See* Book I from this series: *The Storytelling Fundraiser: The Brain, Behavioral Economics, and Fundraising Story.* Chapter 6, "The secret to fundraising math: Gifts of wealth not income".

Why? QBE shows that predictions are powerful. People tend to change their future behavior to match their predictions. So, we don't want donors committing to a hard "no." Here, that isn't possible.

Also missing is a "don't know" option. These options are attractive. They're easy. But that's not the goal. We want donors to *spend time thinking* about these types of gifts. Forcing other responses requires more thought.

Removing the "don't know" can also help with follow-up opportunities. Some "don't know" answers will instead become positive responses when that option is removed. A response of "somewhat likely" can justify a follow-up conversation. A "don't know" won't do this.

Another option is, "Have already done so." This has a specific purpose. It's to get information about the gift in a will. (Other past gifts would already appear in the charity's records.) Including this for all gifts prevents the will question from standing out. (Remember, we want to "bury" the death question. It should feel like just another way to give.) Also, for those who have made any gifts, answering helps donors think this:

> "I am the type of person who makes gifts like these."

Survey outcomes: Follow up

In Socratic fundraising, there's a final step before the ask. That step is to get permission to present options. This is permission to make the ask. A survey can help.

A donor might check, "Would like more information." Or they might check "Definitely" or "Somewhat likely" for an asset gift. These give a reason for a contact. The contact can lead to permission to make the ask. A call might sound like the following.

> "Hello Sara?"
>
> "Hi, this is [name] from [charity]. Don't worry, I'm not calling to ask for a gift today. I wanted to thank you for your years of support of [cause]. Your gifts have really made a difference for [beneficiaries]."
>
> "Also, I wanted to thank you for completing our survey a few days ago. This really helps our leadership. It's important for them to know what matters to loyal donors like you. So, thanks for that!"
>
> "I also wanted to follow up with you on one thing. You mentioned in the survey that you ["would like more information about" / "might be considering"] a gift ["of real estate" / "of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds" / "from an IRA"]. I work with many donors like you who've made these types of gifts. The extra tax benefits really make it a smarter way to give.

> Would you mind telling me if anything in particular prompted you to [request that information / consider this type of a gift]?"
>
> "I'd love to share some examples of what others like you are doing. I think you'll find some of the options interesting. This can also help with your giving to other causes, not just ours. I'll be in your area next Tuesday. Would your calendar allow us to meet at 2pm?"
>
> "Great! I'll put together some options for you. Before we meet, is there anything you want me to know about the ["real estate" / "investments" / "IRA"]? I know sometimes there are special issues with ["property" / "certain types of investments"]."

Of course, this is just one example. There are many ways to phrase this conversation.[54] But the goal is the same. Get permission to present options.

That meeting then allows for a soft proposal. It gives examples of gifts the donor could make. It uses any asset details from the survey or the conversation. It shows the benefits of giving smarter.

More importantly, it should show *the impact* from the donor's gift. This impact should be in the

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[54] *See* a great example in Ciconte, B. L. & Jacob, J. G. (2009). *Fundraising basics: A complete guide*. Jones & Bartlett Learning. p. 421. This uses phrases such as, "Would you mind telling me if there is anything in particular that prompted you to request that information?... I'd like to help you, if I may. The information we sent was very general in nature. I would be happy to send you more specific information on the subject of estate planning or even stop by for a visit."

areas most important to the donor. Fortunately, the survey reveals that, too.

This follow up can be powerful. But it requires changing the way most charities do donor surveys. Charities are used to big mailings. That's how appeal letters work. But it's not how surveys work. At least not if we want to follow up with donors. Follow up requires sending small batches.

How small? Calculate this backwards. Start with end. How many follow-up contacts can you make in a short time? Divide this by the expected response rate. Divide this by the expected share of surveys with positive answers to key questions. That's the maximum to send out at one time.

For example, (50 follow-up calls / .12 response rate) / .20 positive answers = 2,083 surveys. If we don't know these numbers, we guess. The first few batches will show the answers. Of course, *simple* follow ups can work at higher volumes. If a donor wants a publication, newsletter, or event details, that's easy.[55]

[55] An option might include, "Would you be interested in receiving our regular newsletter or additional information?" Alexander, G. D. & Carlson, K. J. (2005). *Essential principles for fundraising success: An answer manual for the everyday challenges of raising money.* Jossey-Bass. pp. 174-175.

Survey outcomes: Teach something about the donor

Questions can work even without the follow up.[56] The idea behind the Socratic method is that questions can teach. Most powerfully, questions can help a person teach himself. Questions can help the donor connect his values, people, and history with the charity. They can help the donor define a personally meaningful victory. They can increase interest in giving.

Survey outcomes: Teach something about the charity

Beyond this, the survey itself can inform. It can share information about charity projects. Rating the importance of a project requires learning about it. A donor might think this:

- "I didn't know they protected coral reefs, too."
- "I didn't know they had conservation centers. Maybe I should visit?"

Survey outcomes: Teach something about giving

The survey can reference new gift types. Rating the likelihood of making a gift requires thinking about it. Questions can imply that others like the donor make these gifts. This establishes social norms. Questions can change mindsets. Many donors think of gifts only as coming from disposable income.

[56] Thus, even anonymous surveys can be useful in affecting donor behavior.

Asking about asset gifts can change that reference point.

A donor might think, "I didn't know that other people,

- "Save takes by making gifts of stocks or real estate"
- "Make gifts that pay them income"
- "Make estate gifts in memory of a loved one"
- "Avoid income taxes by making gifts from an IRA"

Survey outcomes: Teach something by asking for guidance

Other questions can teach in a different way. They can ask for opinions about communications.[57] By giving a judgment, donors are engaging with the messages. Examples of this approach include,

- "Please compare the two stories and select which of the two stories made you feel the following.
  1. Made me value the work of [charity] even more.
  2. Increased my connection to the cause.
  3. Moved me emotionally."[58]

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[57] Knowing that donors prefer one advertisement to another is also useful information. But it isn't the most relevant outcome of interest. Ultimately, the key question for an advertisement is its effect on behavior rather than whether people prefer it.

[58] Davis, L. & Biles, S. (2019, February 28-March 1). Reinventing an established gifts in wills program. [Slide deck]. *Fundraising Institute of Australia*

- "It would be most helpful to me if when you read the booklet you note how it's written. Do you like the style? Are the examples clear? Do you have any suggestions on how we might improve it?"[59]
- Which of these ads about giving stocks do you think others will find most compelling?
- We need your help! Estate gifts have always been critical for [this charity]. But this is a sensitive topic. So, we need your advice. We're considering using one of these two brochures. Would you share your thoughts by answering a few questions about them?

Survey outcomes: Timely reminders

Being "top of the mind" is important for any donation.[60] But it's particularly important for rare event gifts. The sale of stocks or real estate may seldom arise. But any parts donated *before* the sale avoid capital gains tax. Being "top of the mind" before such events is critical.

Conference 2019, Melbourne, Australia. An alternative form could change the questions from self to other: "Which do you think would be more likely to: 1. Help others value the work of [charity] even more. 2. Increase their feeling of connection to the cause. 3. Move them emotionally." These indirect questions may be easier to answer and sometimes provide more insight. They also emphasize the consultative or advice-giving framework of the task.

[59] Ciconte, B. L. & Jacob, J. G. (2009). *Fundraising basics: A complete guide*. Jones & Bartlett Learning. p. 421.

[60] In an unusual example of the role of reminders on donations, one study found that donations to medical nonprofits increased following the issuance of postage stamps associated with related medical topics. Walczak, S., & Switzer, A. E. (2019). Raising social awareness through philately and its effect on philanthropy. *Philanthropy & Education, 3*(1), 73-102.

Drafting a new will tends to be triggered by rare life events. Family changes (marriage, divorce, widowhood, birth of a first child or grandchild) trigger new planning.[61] Health events (diagnosis with cancer, declining health) do the same. Being "top of the mind" at such times is critical.[62] A survey can remind donors of these gift ideas. Sometimes the reminder will come at just the right time.

Survey outcomes: Learn something

First, a warning. This isn't survey research. It's Socratic fundraising. There are guides for survey research. Don't get confused by these. That's not what we're doing. Aimée Lindenberger explains,

> "A good [donor] survey is not about information. It's about self-reflection. It's a conversation on paper."[63]

The donor survey uses questions to guide the donor. It helps the donor discover something about

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[61] James, R. N., III. (2009). Health, wealth, and charitable estate planning: A longitudinal examination of testamentary charitable giving plans. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 38*(6), 1026-1043.

[62] On the importance of being "top of the mind" see experimental results showing that just asking the question, "Would you like to leave any money to charity in your will?" more than doubles the share of people including charity in their will documents. Cabinet Office (2013). *Applying behavioral insights to charitable giving*. Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team. pp. 22-23; On the fluidity of the charitable component in estate plans *see* James, R. N., III. (2020). The emerging potential of longitudinal empirical research in estate planning: Examples from charitable bequests. *UC Davis Law Review, 53*, 2397-2431; James, R. N., III., & Baker, C. (2015). The timing of final charitable bequest decisions. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 20*(3), 277-283.

[63] Lindenberger, A. (2019, March 31). *Why your donor doesn't want to meet and what you can do about it.* [Slide deck]. *AFP ICON 2019*, San Antonio, TX. Slide 23.

himself. Its purpose is to persuade.[64] But we can still learn something. Along the way we can receive useful information. A donor's answers can lead to meaningful follow-up conversations.

Sometimes we might analyze groups of surveys. But we must keep in mind that these are persuasive surveys. The responses are intentionally biased.[65]

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[64] Both Socratic fundraising and survey research use questions. But they use them for different purposes. Misunderstanding this sometimes causes confusion. For example the Council of American Survey Research Organizations has guidelines for survey research companies. But these rules would make no sense for companies asking questions for, say, prospect identification. When a car dealer asks, "Are you planning to purchase a new car in the next three months?" it isn't conducting survey research. It's trying to sell cars.
Similarly, applying the rules of academic research to Socratic fundraising doesn't make sense. Thus, the advice that I am sharing here will in places conflict with the approach taken by Kevin Schulman in his article "Facts and Myths of Donor Surveys." http://agitator.thedonorvoice.com/facts-and-myths-of-donor-surveys/ The reason is simple. He is writing about survey research. I am not. I am writing about Socratic fundraising. His focus is on accurately uncovering "deeper constructs" of donor motivation. (Answering such "why" questions is the typical focus for academic research. Conversely, fundraisers tend to be focused on "what works" while having somewhat less concern for the underlying "why" questions.) Thus, he dislikes leading questions that bias people towards a "yes" answer. I insist on them. He dislikes questions about future intentions. I insist on them. He's not wrong. And neither am I. We're just using questions for different purposes. The questions in this chapter are not designed to uncover hidden psychological webs of interconnected constructs underlying donor intentions. Those goals are achieved by different research methodologies using different questions and different data analysis. The purpose of these questions is to persuade.

[65] It's also important to keep in mind that even when *you* are not biasing the results, the donors still are. In other words, donors' responses shouldn't be taken as accurately describing reality. They should be taken simply as donors' responses. For example, social desirability bias means that when people are asked for their motivations, they will tend to give the most socially appropriate ones. Thus, donors will be unlikely to self-report that they are motivated by tax benefits. This doesn't mean such benefits aren't motivational. This is demonstrated not only in econometric analysis of national datasets, but also from randomized controlled experimental studies. People's self-reported statements of motivations don't mean we should avoid mentioning such benefits. It means only that we can't test this issue in this way (i.e., via self-report).

This means *relative* levels will be more meaningful. Asking, "Are people interested in project X?" isn't the right question. The survey is designed to generate positive answers. The better question is, "How does interest in project X compare with project Y or Z?"

Also, questions can measure relative shifts in attitudes. We might want to know, "Are the legacy fundraising messages working?" These gifts won't arrive for many years. But regular surveys can show donor intentions. A shift in responses over time can reveal progress.[66]

Similarly, finding that older donors are unlikely to report they are *planning* to make changes in their will documents doesn't mean they aren't *going* to make such changes. Older adults make changes in their will documents due to unplanned shocks: divorce, widowhood, marriage, birth of a first grandchild, diagnosis with cancer, rapid decline in health, etc. Thus, they are still, for many reasons, the right target audience. Similarly, the idea that people are unlikely to recall having dropped a charity from their estate plans doesn't means such plans aren't highly fluid. Donors need not consciously drop a charity. They just make a new plan. The charity doesn't happen to come to mind during that process. (Estate planning attorneys rarely charge clients to read through an old will that is about to be revoked, much less carry over provisions from that document. Their document creation systems are somewhat automated and construct new documents based upon the client's current answers to questions regarding assets, family members, and current goals.) Even if the decision was, at the time, a conscious one, doesn't mean that such – somewhat less than socially desirable – actions are likely to be recalled later. However, misinterpretations of donors' responses to questions are common in fundraising advice. This is especially true when these results promote ideas that make fundraisers' work less burdensome. Many fundraisers are naturally drawn to the idea that they don't need to learn anything about charitable tax benefits. Many legacy fundraisers enjoy the suggestion that they can just work with people their own age and then "count it and forget it." This is easier than including the oldest old in their visits.
In fundraising, we are ultimately interested in behavior (giving) rather than opinion. Answers to questions are important, but they aren't the same as behavior.

[66] However, this works only if the questions don't change. Otherwise, it may be impossible to know whether any changes in responses were due to a change in attitudes or a change in the questions themselves.

Surveys can also help improve the charity's words and phrases. Appeal letters can test these for small gifts. But this is harder for major gifts of assets. A survey can help. Phrases or questions that increase *predictions* will tend to increase *donations*.[67] We can alter stories, words, or sequencing. Each small batch survey can be another experiment. This testing helps constantly improve the messages.

Other survey issues: Print or online?

Online surveys are cheaper than mail or telephone surveys. Response rates are also lower.[68] The question of which to use depends on the goals. Start with the online survey. It's the cheapest.

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[67] In experiments, measuring expressions of charitable intentions have produced results similar to those using real donation requests (Dickert, Sagara, & Slovic, 2011). Even measurements of hypothetical intentions to donate reveal similar motivations (Nilsson, Erlandsson, & Västfjäll, 2016) and similar choices (Carlsson & Martinsson, 2001) as compared to measuring actual donations. For example, one experiment found no significant differences in the effect of others' donations between hypothetical contribution experiments and actual contribution experiments (Alpizar, Carlsson, & Johansson-Stenman, 2008).
Alpizar, F., Carlsson, F., & Johansson-Stenman, O. (2008). Does context matter more for hypothetical than for actual contributions? Evidence from a natural field experiment. *Experimental Economics, 11*(3), 299-314.
Carlsson, F., & Martinsson, P. (2001). Do hypothetical and actual marginal willingness to pay differ in choice experiments? Application to the valuation of the environment. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management, 41*(2), 179-192.
Dickert, S., Sagara, N., & Slovic, P. (2011). Affective motivations to help others: A two-stage model of donation decisions. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making, 24*(4), 361-376.
Nilsson, A., Erlandsson, A., & Västfjäll, D. (2016). The congruency between moral foundations and intentions to donate, self-reported donations, and actual donations to charity. *Journal of Research in Personality, 65*, 22–29.
[68] Shih, T.-H., & Xitao, F. (2008). Comparing response rates from web and mail surveys: A meta-analysis. *Field Methods, 20*, 249-271.

If the goal is just to get a set of responses, this can be enough. Reaching more people requires more channels. Next, mail to those who don't respond to the online request. This is more expensive. Finally, call those who don't respond to mail. This is yet more expensive. (It's also riskier if callers are outsiders or aren't trained well.)

Other survey issues: How long should it be?

Some donor surveys use just a few questions. An appeal reply card might add just one or two.[69] Others are several pages long. Which is better? The answer is this: It's a tradeoff.

Within reason, more questions are better. For example, one experiment used some of the previous questions. These were about the donor's (1) people, (2) values, and (3) life story connections. Using all three types worked better than using any one or two alone.[70] More was better.

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[69] This might seem to contradict the suggestion to avoid making an ask with the survey. But this is different. This isn't presented or justified as primarily being a survey instrument. It's presented as a donation request with one or two questions added at the end. Those *not* donating wouldn't infer that they should return the response card. The questions are never presented as a survey instrument for everyone. The questions are only for those who are donating to the appeal.

[70] James, R. N., III. (2016, March 7). *Using biasing questions in charitable bequest surveys.* Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2744006

Another experiment tested the effects of reading planned gift donor stories.[71] Reading seven stories worked better than reading four. Reading four worked better than reading none. More was better.

This effect is not specific to fundraising. Psychology studies show the same thing. Triggering more expressions of an attitude changes things. It increases commitment to the underlying belief.[72] It increases actions that match those beliefs.[73]

But there is a tradeoff. Questions don't work if donors don't answer them. The longer the survey, the less likely it is to be completed.[74] "Length" here isn't just about page numbers or word count. It's about how easy it *feels* to take the survey. Simple words help. Short sentences do to. Active verbs also help.

Attractive design also increases response rates. One study showed the positive effects of

- "Use of accent color

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[71] James, R. N., III., & Routley, C. (2016). We the living: the effects of living and deceased donor stories on charitable bequest giving intentions. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 21*(2), 109-117.
[72] Descheemaeker, M., Spruy, A., Faxio, R. H., & Hermans, D. (2017). On the generalization of attitude accessibility after repeated attitude expression. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 47*, 97-104; Holland, R. W., Verplanken, B., & van Knippenberg, A. (2003). From repetition to conviction: Attitude accessibility as a determinant of attitude certainty. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 39*(6), 594-601.
[73] Downing, J. W., Judd, C. M., & Brauer, M. (1992). Effects of repeated expressions on attitude extremity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*(1), 17-29.
[74] *See, e.g.,* Rolstad, S., Adler, J., & Rydén, A. (2011). Response burden and questionnaire length: is shorter better? A review and meta-analysis. *Value in Health, 14*(8), 1101-1108.

- Additional navigation cues to call out section headings
- More than one blank line between survey questions
- White space between survey question-response option block is larger than white space between a survey question and response options associated with the question
- One or more blank lines between end of survey question and start of response options
- A line or other demarcation between columns of survey questions
- Visible or extra white space on the survey page" [75]

Most of these increase the physical length of the survey. But they may make it feel easier. They make it more inviting.

These design elements were most important for one group. They increased answers the most from the oldest respondents. Getting more responses isn't just about making the survey short. It's about making it feel attractive and easy.

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[75] Quoted from *Appendix B. Description of Respondent Friendly Survey Design and Coding of Attractiveness* in Burkhart, Q., Orr, N., Brown, J. A., Hays, R. D., Cleary, P. D., Beckett, M. K., ... & Elliott, M. N. (*In Press*). Associations of mail survey length and layout with response rates. *Medical Care Research and Review,* https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1077558719888407

Conclusion

Done the right way, asking questions is powerful. The format can differ. It might start with a social conversation. It might be part of a formal campaign feasibility study.[76] It might be a focus group. It might be a phone survey. It might be a paper or electronic survey. But the steps are the same. The principles don't change. Appreciative inquiry is compelling. Socratic fundraising works.

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[76] For a great example of questions used in a formal feasibility study in a campaign, *see* Ciconte, B. L. & Jacob, J. G. (2009). *Fundraising basics: A complete guide*. Jones & Bartlett Learning. Appendix 14-D. p. 392. *American Society of Civil Engineers Foundation 2002: Building the Future. Feasibility Study Questions.*

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This book highlights advice from many of the most knowledgeable fundraisers. To learn more, please consider purchasing their books.

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Dr. James has published research in over 75 peer-reviewed scientific journal and law review articles. He has been quoted on charitable and financial issues in a variety of news sources including *The Economist, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, CNN, MSNBC, CNBC, ABC News, U.S. News & World Report, USA Today, the Associated Press, Bloomberg News,* and the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. His financial neuroimaging research was profiled in *The Wall Street Journal's Smart Money Magazine*.

His other books include

Visual Planned Giving: An Introduction to the Law & Taxation of Charitable Gift Planning

Inside the Mind of the Bequest Donor: A Visual Presentation of the Neuroscience and Psychology of Effective Planned Giving Communication

For links to his videos, slide presentations, and papers, please connect on LinkedIn.