

Good Advice for Fundraisers in 1890 Memo



Before heading out to meet a donor or sponsor, you might be well-advised to heed the words of Frederick Taylor Gates, who wrote the following memo on May 26, 1890. The memo refers to the two-man campaign, conducted during the year 1889-90.

1. Dress well. Put on your best clothes and let them be costly. Let your linen be immaculate. See that your boots are polished, and also that your hands are kept clean and your hair well brushed, not only in the morning, but kept so throughout the rough and tumble of the day. To this end, it would be necessary to go into hotels occasionally, consult the bootblack, the lavatory and brush up. This is no trifling thing. People size up one's importance and dignity very largely by his personal appearance, and the size of their gifts, if not indeed any gift at all, will depend not a little on their estimation of the importance and dignity of the canvassers. People are judged by these apparent trifles of personal appearance far more than supposed, and the streets of Chicago soil the person hourly.
2. Keep absolutely and serenely good humoured. Mark, I say good humoured, not gay. Enter the room in genial and radiant good nature and allow no lapse from this for an instant under any provocation. At times and perhaps when you least expect it, you will have justification for irritation, but under no circumstances betray the least suspicion of irritation. Be armoured habitually against it.
3. Provide yourself with an elegant personal card and put on that card nothing whatever but just your name. Cut off all your titles and do not let the card indicate even your business.
4. On entering, go straight to your subject without palaver; ask if a few minutes can be spared for you and do not press your work without consent but do not allow the impression of the first sixty seconds to be that you are in for a long talk. On the contrary in various indirect ways, awaken the happy anticipation that your stay will be brief without being abrupt.
5. I said in my second point that you must keep good-natured. I now wish to say that you must also keep your victim, if I may so call him, also good-natured and this throughout. Constantly endeavour to make the interview continuously pleasant for him. If you find him embarrassed at any point relieve that embarrassment. For illustration: He may be embarrassed by the smallness of the amount which he can give. The best class of men often are. Reassure him on this if you find he needs it and on any other point of embarrassment.
6. If you find him big with gift, do not rush him too eagerly to the birth. Let him take his time with genial encouragement. Make him feel that he is making the gift, not that it is being taken from him with violence.
7. Appeal only to the noblest motives. His own mind will suggest to him all the more selfish ones, but he will not wish you to suppose that he has thought of these.
8. Never let a week pass without some public notice of your work. This will be your most distasteful duty, but will become less so after you know the ropes. Your name should always appear in connection with your work. You must stand before the public as a public man and the distinct representative of your cause.
9. It is of the highest importance that you have a companion in your canvass ... In all respects a par wit yourself. That you and your companion know each other intimately. That you study team work. So that you do not collide but by the study of your man, know which is to take the ball and which is to lead in the principal play. Your victim will, himself, unconsciously and instinctively decide which of the two of you he prefers to talk to. Let him make his choice. There is wisdom underlying Christ's sending forth his disciples not singly, but in pairs.
10. Let the victim talk freely, especially in the earlier part of the interview. While he is thus revealing himself, he is giving you the opportunity to study him and all his peculiarities. By the time he is through you will be prepared, if you are alert, with your plan of successful attack. Never argue with a man; never contradict him. Never oppose anything which he says, that you are not absolutely bound to oppose by the very essential nature of your mission; in all else yield.

If your man is talkative, let him talk, talk, talk; give your fish line and listen with the deepest interest to every syllable.



11. If he is taciturn, do not try to make him talk but keep your own mill going, while you watch his face. Never permit any embarrassing silences.
12. Withdraw with cordiality when beaten. That is to say: When you fail to get your subscription at the time, which will be four times out of five, from our experience. He will watch closely in what temper you withdraw, but make him feel that the interview has been a distinctly pleasurable one to you. Even if he declines to give, make him, if possible, a friend of the college for all time.
13. But though he declined, do not regard or let him regard the matter as closed. You will be near him again in a few days and things may then look different to him. It is a good plan never to allow a man to give a final no or to commit himself in words definitely and finally against your cause. If you see it coming, if it is evident that he is making no progress, or progress backward, excuse yourself before the fatal word has come out and withdraw so as to give you an excuse for coming again.
14. From the beginning, watch for signs of weariness or impatience.
15. Aim so to conduct a canvass as to raise up a permanent constituency for the cause. Try to make every man you canvass a friend of yourself and of the college whether he gives or not. Aim to make your visit so pleasurable, if possible, that your victim will be distinctly glad to have such pleasing gentlemen call upon him again.
16. Never tell a man how much you think he ought to give. Do not do it even if he asks you, as occasionally a man will. Instead of answering his question, you can say to him you will be glad to tell him what others are giving, if he desires to know, but that you cannot presume to name any figure for himself.
17. Before entering on your canvass, meditate long on the downright merits of the question and do not ask a man for a dollar until you are in the depths of your soul satisfied that, viewed from the highest motives, your cause fully justifies all the gifts and the sacrifices you ask.
18. Work continuously, rapidly and at a hot pace. If your work flags you are gone. Never allow in yourself the smallest relaxation of the nervous tension and if not in yourself, so also not in your friends or the public until your work is done. Canvass every day and all day, going rapidly from man to man, rain or shine. Read nothing, write of nothing, think of nothing, so long as your canvass continues, but the canvass. Speak publicly on that subject only, bringing every ounce of vital energy every moment of waking time to the service of the canvass. Regard every suggestion involving interruption, delay or postponement as treason. Whatever success we achieved, or in my observation, others have achieved under similar circumstances, has been due mainly to the energy with which the subscription once undertaken has been continued.

This rapidity of movement keeps one's self in tension to do his best work. It brings the success, small though it may be, that tends in the aggregate to keep up courage. It keeps your work before your friends and the public. It tends to give it a gradually increased momentum. It gives you something of advance to report each day or each week. Gradually, the work gathers volume, force, breadth, momentum until at last it becomes irresistible and rushes on to a successful culmination. This insistent and persistent energy is the easiest road, as well as the shortest and leads straight to the goal.

Finally, if one adopts these rules and others like them, which will suggest themselves, one will be likely to find the great majority of men - ninety-nine out of every hundred - are in fact pleased and secretly complimented to be courteously and respectfully invited to contribute to a great cause by the men having that cause in charge.

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