

Gotcha: Lessons from a door to door fundraiser!

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It was warm Thursday afternoon in Essex suburbia. I could hear the neighbours cutting the grass and the kettle just boiled for a cup of tea. Breaking the spell of the leisurely summer warmth, the doorbell rang.

I opened the door. A young and enthusiastic Asian guy in a suit smiled broadly at me, clipboard in hand, id hanging innocently around his neck, bright red *Action For Children* bib on ... and my heart sank.

First thoughts: NO! LEAVE ME ALONE! GO AWAY. DON'T YOU KNOW I ALREADY DO A LOT FOR CHARITIES!?

20 minutes later: I had signed up to a standing order of £8.50 a month!

How did that happen? How did I turn an in-the-head-screaming No to a reasonably satisfied Yes?

It began with first noticing that my immediate reaction was quite simply No. N. O. Nada. Go away. The poor guy probably gets that every time. I bet nobody opens their door to him and says, "*Hey, I was just thinking I'd like to donate some money to Action For Children, it's so great you've just arrived!*"

What was great about this guy was that he was relaxed, calm, clear, and just talked. He asked if I could talk to him right now. Well, I wasn't doing much else so, yeah, why not.

He didn't launch into his blurb. He talked about ordinary things. He talked about the neighbours he had just visited *using their first names*, how he was studying at Ealing College, how the day was going so far.

He asked me questions, but not immediately about *Action For Children*. He asked a little about my neighbours. Did I know them well? Did I know that Dave from number 33 had also donated?

I felt slightly guilty that I had never even considered the first name of my neighbour from number 33 but then shrugged that off quickly with the insider knowledge that "*guilt is just one of several motivating factors which lead to action, though not necessarily the most powerful*", blah blah.

At this point I was still a NO but warming to this guy. “Aha,” I told myself, “*this reminds me of some book on fundraising theory I read only yesterday about selling – first you sell yourself and then the prospect will find it easier to trust you.*”

This was quickly followed in my internal dialogue by “*Well then, I’m not going to trust him and let him win!*”

He asked me what I did for a living. I said “*I’m a teacher, but I also do some writing and editing of promotional materials for charities.*” He looked a little bit nervous suddenly and asked “*Am I doing it right? In our training we learned about Pace Pitch and Attitude and also the Law of Averages.*”

I try to maintain my pace, relax into my pitch and yet the most important thing is attitude. You know, if I knock on a hundred doors I get three people who sign up so my goal is to keep walking down the streets, not walking down people.”

I was, to say the least, impressed. Not least that I had been reading about exactly those things only days earlier in a book on fundraising theory by Allan Pease: *Questions Are The Answers*.

Here was a guy who was truly walking his talk. He had taken the theory and was putting it *directly and completely* into practice. How often do most of us do that?

Mostly we’re intelligent, thoughtful, educated people and we know a lot of stuff, but all of what we know doesn’t make one iota of difference if it’s just a load of clever insights.

He was doing everything right. He showed me his id, presented the form easily and smoothly, not like a technique but like someone who just happened to have *what I now wanted*.

I wanted it! Wow. He had won me. A charity had gone from one I had seen once on Red Nose Day and never thought of again to one I was now supporting!

Not only that, but there was a gift. And what a gift it was – an oyster card holder with the charity’s logo and website on the outside and the mission statement on the inside. Brilliant!

It’s just what someone in London’s zone 4 could really do with. As it happened, I had thought my oyster card holder had started to look a bit shabby months ago but it was so far down my list of priorities that, well, that’s as far as the thought went. What a great gift!

Ok, so what are the nuggets wisdom to be drawn from this experience?

1. *Ask, ask, ask and ask some more.* Know your own statistical “law” of averages. Do not be discouraged by people who might not respond to your appeals or requests. Stay focused on finding the people who will.

2. *Train your fundraisers and volunteers. Pace, pitch and attitude.* Whether it is a written appeal, a presentation or a one to one ask pace yourself, write or talk about ordinary things that can connect you with the potential donor. Introduce 'the ask' at the right time and be positive and encouraging rather than fearful and anxious.
3. *Make signing up easy and yet still of course without sacrificing the integrity of the process.*
4. *Give a well thought out gift or acknowledgement.* The more original and practical you can be, the better.
5. *Trust that the theory works and put it into practice.* (You might be surprised how little you actually do that normally.) Many of us go to fundraising training events and say '*well that will not work for us. We are different!*' Well, although the approach might be different the fundraising principles are not. So try them out and see what happens.

In the end I'm glad I gave, reminding me how the donors' heart and soul work. I think many people experience being overwhelmed by requests for charity. Today's crisis-driven media portrays a grim picture of a world none of us feel we can really make a difference in.

Yet we can make a difference, and each time we ask someone to make a gift, there is an opportunity to contribute, a statistical probability that someone will put their drop in the ocean, an opening for someone to bring just another bit of heaven to earth.

If you want to find out more about good fundraising theory and how to put that into practice join us at our of our training events this autumn.

Download an events brochure from: www.mcconkey-johnston.co.uk/events