

Values-Based Donor Cultivation

How one development director cultivated the gift of a lifetime

Natural cultivation is based on more than arbitrary dollar goals. It generates enough energy for development personnel to enjoy day after day because it's creative and renewable. It generates resources for the organization and it fulfills needs and desires of the prospective donors, too. It works all the way around. That's what makes it sustainable.

The following true story is an example of natural cultivation, shared at my encouragement by the development director. Need a reminder of what matters? Please read on.

Bread & Bananas

by Chris Arvidson

In an effort to reach out and cultivate donors, and in the early planning stages of a campaign (the *really* quiet phase), the land trust staff where I was working began a series of visits to donors who were consistent in their giving. They were not necessarily big donors, but they were clearly in for the long haul, giving \$500 or \$1000 each year over the life of the conservancy. The visits were to be conducted by new staff -- new to the organization and new to development work -- a nice way to get their feet wet.

Early one morning I got a call in the office from an elderly man who was to be visited by one of our staff that morning. Here's what he wanted. He wanted us to bring him some bread and some bananas when we came.

What to do? Lots of thoughts slammed through my head. It'd be pretty easy to beg off. I let him know that since the appointment was scheduled for later that morning, I wasn't sure I could track the person coming, but I let him know that I would try, hedging my bets. I found our staff person and told her that I thought, if at all possible, she should stop on her way and get the bread and bananas... not

that it was in her job description to run errands for some old guy... but then again, it wasn't really much trouble, was it?

She was willing and flexible; excellent traits for development work. She stopped at the store on her way to his house and took him the bread and bananas and they had a pleasant visit.

In the weeks following, in the course of the usual follow-up, it became clear that the old gentleman's health was declining quickly. We never did get the chance to talk with him about a planned gift, or any other gift for that matter. Within 6 months, he died. He had been a resident of the area most of his life, was a fairly prominent member of the non-profit volunteer community, and a well-known member of a large church congregation in town.

A short time after we saw the obituary in the paper, we got a call from his lawyer. The old man had left all he had to us as an unrestricted six-figure gift. It was an amount of some significance for an organization of our size.

Did he choose us, over all the other nonprofits he'd been associated with over the years, because of the bread and bananas?

We'll never know. In my fundraising gut, though, I think it was that bread and those bananas that made up his mind.

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