

TOP 8 MISTAKES to AVOID

1. Talking Too Much, Listening Too Little

Many fundraisers spend most of the meeting explaining programs, budgets, and organizational needs.

Mistake:

- Giving a presentation instead of having a conversation.

Better approach:

- Ask open-ended questions:
 - "What inspired your previous philanthropy?"
 - "What issues are most important to you?"
 - "What kind of impact would you like your giving to have?"

A good rule: **Listen 70%, talk 30%.**

2. Asking Too Soon

One of the fastest ways to damage a relationship is making a large ask before trust and interest have been established.

Mistake:

- Treating a prospect like an ATM.

Warning Signs:

- You know very little about the donor's motivations.
- The donor has had minimal engagement with the organization.
- The relationship exists only when money is needed.

Successful major gifts are usually the result of cultivation, not surprise requests.

- NEVER call them a Major Donor
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3. Making the Meeting About Organizational Problems

Donors generally want to invest in solutions and impact, not deficits, needs, and crises.

Mistake:

"We're short on our budget and really need help."

Better:

"Here's the change your support can make for 500 families this year."
People fund vision more readily than need.

4. Failing to Make a Clear Ask

Some fundraisers finish a great meeting and never actually ask.

Mistake:

"We hope you'll continue to support us."

The donor leaves wondering what was expected.

Better:

"Would you consider a gift of \$50,000 to help launch this initiative?"
Clarity demonstrates confidence.

5. Asking for the Wrong Amount

A request that is too high can feel unrealistic; too low can leave significant support untapped.

Mistake:

- Making a number up on the spot.
- Not considering the donor's giving history and capacity.

Preparation is essential. The ask should be thoughtful and evidence-based.

6. Focusing on Money Instead of Partnership

Major donors often want to contribute and help make a difference more than just write a check to meet a need.

Mistake:

- Seeing the donor only as a source of funds.

Better:

- Invite ideas.
- Seek advice.
- Provide opportunities for engagement.

People support organizations where they feel valued, not merely solicited.

7. Neglecting Follow-Up and Stewardship

This is one of the most common errors.

Mistake:

- Sending a thank-you letter and then disappearing until the next campaign. Think of creative ways to thank them OFTEN.

Better:

- Report outcomes.
- Share success stories.
- Demonstrate how the gift made a difference.
- Stay in touch throughout the year.

The period **after the gift** largely determines whether the next gift happens.

8. Taking "No" Personally

A donor's refusal may have nothing to do with the organization.

Mistake:

- Assuming the relationship is over.

A "no" may mean:

- Not now
- Not that project
- Not that amount
- Not this year

Maintain the relationship respectfully and professionally.

A Simple Summary . . .

Avoid these five "D's":

1. **Don't dominate the conversation.**
2. **Don't rush the ask.**
3. **Don't focus on deficits.**
4. **Don't be vague about the request.**
5. **Don't disappear after the gift**