



18 FUNDRAISING TRUISMS

By Henry E. ("Hank") Riggs
Assembled by Elliott Wright

My friend Henry E. (Hank) Riggs worked in Silicon Valley in the 1960s, and then, in 1974, became a professor of engineering at Stanford University.

In 1983, Hank took on the challenge of overseeing all fundraising efforts at Stanford. He transformed the scale of academic philanthropy, leading Stanford's first billion-dollar academic fundraising campaign, which set a precedent for large institutions.

Up until his death in 2015 Hank taught a Stanford course called "The Art and Logic of Fundraising" and was working on a book with the same title. Another friend of mine, Elliott Wright, pulled together a list of eighteen of Hank's "fundraising truisms."

I think they can be valuable to all nonprofits, and wanted to share them with you. I hope that you, in turn, will share them with friends, family and colleagues.

And please visit my website, [Applied Wisdom for the Nonprofit Sector](#), for more insights into fundraising and the nonprofit sector.

To your success,
Jim Morgan

1. Gift giving is a voluntary act on the part of donors. Fundraisers don't raise gifts; donors give gifts. Fundraisers facilitate donor generosity.
2. Institutional needs don't sell; institutional opportunities do.
3. The primary motivations for giving are: alignment, impact, affiliation, recognition, and leverage.
4. Tax deductibility of gifts can influence gift amounts, but tax considerations don't motivate donors to give.
5. Donors make gifts to individuals; seldom to organizations. Thus, building relationships between donor prospects and key staff members, volunteers, or both is essential.
6. Every prospective donor deserves to be asked carefully, sincerely, in a timely manner, by the right person or team.
7. The best prospect for a gift is a donor who is pleased with the gift he or she made in the past.
8. Saying thank you – for gifts, meetings, interest – should be done in a timely, personal, sincere manner. Personal hand-written notes are golden.

9. The key task for a fundraiser, when meeting with a donor prospect, is to listen, listen, listen – carefully, intently, comprehensively, and with good recall.
10. There is no single successful “fundraising personality.” A sincere interest in people and a passion for the mission can be present in many different personalities.
11. A gift having unacceptable conditions (such as attendant costs or questionable ethics) should be declined. Living up to the letter and spirit of the gift’s conditions is essential. Occasionally a proffered gift should be declined because it is not in the donor’s best interests.
12. The gestation period for a large gift may be months or years. Patience is key; procrastination in “asking” is wasteful.
13. Donors are seldom insulted by being asked for too large a gift. They may be surprised, amused, or even complimented.
14. A donor’s first “no” need not be taken as a final “no” – if the conversation can be kept open.
15. The chief fundraiser in every nonprofit is the senior administrator, who must learn to enjoy the role.
16. The best advocates for an organization are the participants and the beneficiaries (clients, students, artists, patrons) and they enjoy the opportunity. Don’t leave fundraising solely to fundraisers.
17. No donor makes a gift of his or her last dollar. Thus, both good manners and good fundraising argue that every donor deserves appropriate stewardship.
18. It may seem unfair, but the rich (successful) nonprofits get richer (and more successful!)... and the poor languish.