

“As the purse is emptied, the heart is filled.”

-Victor Hugo

Fundraising In Action

Greetings fellow Habitat 500 cyclists! I am happy to say that I am signed up for this year's ride and can't wait to see you in Minnesota in July. Whether you need more training on the bike or more funds to reach your personal and community goals, you are not alone. What follows are a few fundraising concepts that I've drawn from my experience over the past twelve years. These time-tested tips have worked for me and I hope they bring you great success.

Keep it simple. Refine your introductory message down to its basic elements. Develop a few simple sentences telling those across from you 1) Who you are, 2) What you are doing, 3) Why you are doing it and 4) How they can be a part of what you are doing.

Ask, ask, ask. I can't stress this one enough, my fellow bikers. The good news is that most people are happy to contribute some amount. Some donors will approach you, but most of those who are willing to give won't give until they are asked. Instead of thinking that you are burdening others by asking for a pledge, think of it as inviting others to be a part of something exciting: An adventure, a mission, riding 500 miles in a week, showing love in action, being of service to others, helping a family to grow, strengthening a community! Give the gift of including others.

Set a goal. Your goal needs to be a specific dollar amount. Be realistic, but stretch yourself. State with confidence the specific amount you are raising. Donors will respond if you have a set amount and you know what you want. Imagine what it would be like if someone were to ask you to sponsor them for a bike ride. Just a bike ride, with no set distance. Not very inspiring, is it? Just as your biking goal is to ride 500 miles in a week, set a specific dollar amount that you will raise for Habitat for Humanity.

You may find you achieve your dollar amount sooner than you thought. If this happens - GREAT JOB!!! Now, reset your goal and keep going.

Express yourself. Think of three heartfelt reasons why you are involved in the mission of Habitat for Humanity and are riding 500 miles in a week during the heat and humidity of July in Minnesota. Some of my reasons: I ride as a way to express my love in action, pedaling as an act of faith. I ride to be a part of a larger community working to make a difference in the world. I ride because everyone needs a home. You have compelling reasons; don't keep them to yourself. Share them.

Speak up. You know what you want to say, you know how you want to say it, now find an audience. Be creative. Churches, business groups, and civic groups are all good

places to start. Ask to speak for seven minutes. That's plenty of time to get your message across. Don't be surprised if there are lots of questions. Be prepared with answers. A question that frequently comes up is "What do you eat when you are riding?" During my first Habitat 500 I was in the habit of eating oatmeal pies while riding. I was pedaling around with a whole box of oatmeal pies strapped onto the rear rack of my bike!

When you present to others, bring a visual, such as a route map, bike helmet, water bottle, energy bar, your bike, or a picture of a Habitat home and family. Having something to look at can inspire others and it adds another dimension to your presentation. I always bring along my bike helmet; sometimes I'll wear a bike jersey from a Habitat 500 ride and when I can, I bring my bike.

Ready for this one? Try the old fashioned method of going door to door. Talk to strangers. Challenge yourself and move beyond the circle of those you already know. Knocking on that door is one of the more effective ways to share your message and improve your presentation skills, not to mention raise pledges. I have raised significant pledge amounts on the spot from people I didn't know before I knocked on their door. I'll always remember one house where I made a presentation to an older couple. I gave it my best effort, but couldn't tell how I was being received. There was a moment when I thought that I should just thank them and head out the door. The moment passed, and they said they would make a pledge. I left with greater confidence and a five hundred dollar check! Surprise yourself. What's behind door number one?

Utilize local media. Call your local newspaper and public radio station to schedule an interview. You have a newsworthy story to share. It can inspire others. Who knows who you might reach? A donor? A future Habitat homeowner?

Write a letter. A written appeal is a great way to reach out to your donors. Make it personal and include photos.

Show enthusiasm!!! It takes a lot of energy to ride 500 miles. Be sure and show some of that energy when talking with others. Smile, laugh and make it fun. Tell a story from the road and bring your audience along on the ride. Here's one for you -- First day of the Habitat 500, 2006. Riding into Duluth, I was looking for a library and had gotten turned around and stopped at a house to ask for directions. I had just gotten off my bike when a boy who looked no older than four came bursting through the front door and onto the porch. He was jumping up and down, could not contain his excitement. He shouted with joy, "Mommy! Mommy! The pizza man is here! The pizza man is here!!!" When I found the library, it was closed. It didn't matter. I was the pizza man.

Throw a party. You can generate a great deal of excitement and pledges around an event. If possible, partner with your local affiliate. Think big - food, music, local artists, performers, include local businesses. Set aside time during the festivities to give a brief

presentation. Set up a donation table by the door.

Plan. Block off your schedule. We all know the physical training for the Habitat 500 takes time. I like to block off my training time with a yellow highlighter. Fundraising also takes time and it's even easier for me to put off than training. I use the same method with fundraising time. I block it off on my schedule. Whether it's an hour and a half on a weekday after work going door to door or a Sunday morning church service, it's blocked off and on the schedule. Plan a little fundraising each week. Pace yourself.

Go team! Are you the type of rider that likes to have a friend along on a ride? Someone to chat with while the miles roll along? Someone to point out the pothole up ahead or help out with a flat tire? I know I am. It's a big reason I keep coming back to the Habitat 500 - the spirit of community. Just like the ride, you can create a spirit of community around fundraising. I have recruited friends to go door to door. We'll meet at the end of the block to see who collected the most pledges, share stories and encourage each other. Friends have joined me for presentations and tended to a donation and information table, taking questions and helping with paperwork. Friends can make fundraising more fun.

Collect pledges. When I present to an assembly or go door to door, I always take a clipboard, pen, pledge sheets, and a large brown envelope with a clasp (to hold all those pledges). A common question after someone decides they would like to make a pledge is, "When do you need the money?" Here is the best answer: "Now." If at all possible, leave with a pledge in hand. If not, clearly record the amount pledged and a contact number for the donor. It feels great to have a long list of pledges committed on paper, but committed pledges do not count towards your total. In the end, only collected pledges count! A pledge in hand is worth... you get the idea.

Show thanks. So, you've collected your pledges, met your goal and had a fantastic time on the Habitat 500. Thank those who supported your ride and were with you in spirit. It was a group effort. It's fun for donors to receive postcards or pictures from the route. One year I sent everyone postcards from the SPAM museum in Austin, Minnesota, who had pledged my ride. They were a huge hit. Everyone likes being appreciated, and with a heartfelt thanks, they will remember you with a smile should you ask for a pledge again next year!

Fellow riders, I sincerely hope these concepts were like a well needed rest stop on the route and you are now feeling energized and ready to get back on the bike. Happy fundraising and I'll see you all in Minnesota!

Tim Dellett