



Getting Past the Fear of Asking

by Robbie Samuels, Professional Speaker | Author | Podcast Host | Coach

Mary was having a hard time. She had fallen into her industry completely by accident and just as she was ready to commit to a program that would give her the credentials she needed to move forward – she was laid off. Despite this, she knew this was the field for her and was ready to dedicate herself to the kind of professional development she needed to succeed.

Fortunately, Mary had been actively attending her industry's association meetings and remembered attending an event that was a fundraiser for their Foundation. A few moments searching online and she learned there were scholarships available that would help her move through to the next level of her career.

That was 8 years ago. Now she's president-elect and in charge of coordinating the fundraising event that gave her hope so many years earlier. But she's pretty nervous about raising money. In fact, it's something she has managed to avoid her whole career. And she knows that she has to not only raise a lot of funds, but she has to inspire her team of volunteers to join her in that effort.

So she starts by asking everyone assembled – "How do you feel about soliciting – asking for money?" As you might imagine, she heard a chorus of "hate it," "nervous," "like I'm begging," and "it depends on the cause." And this was the group that had said yes to being on the fundraising event planning committee – so she could only imagine what the rest of the members thought about fundraising.

Then Mary asked them "How do you feel when you write a check to your favorite organization?" She gives some context: This is money they've set aside for charity - not their lunch money or fun money. The organization is one they've gotten to know and respect - and the cause is one they care deeply about. They're about to write the check, or more likely filling out a form on a website, how do they feel now?

The room immediately lightens up and the responses include "great," "engaged," "making a difference," "good," and "wish I could do more."

"Interesting," Mary thought to herself, "asking for money makes people feel anxious, but donating makes them feel awesome." She points this out and asks everyone to reflect on that for a moment. Asking = bad, giving = good.

If you identify with Mary, here are six fundraising truths you could share with your fundraising committee after asking those two questions:

What's the number one reason people don't give? They are not asked. That's right, people don't give if they're not asked, and they're more likely to give if someone they know and trust asks them. So if you don't get past your fear of asking you are denying your friends the ability to feel like they're making a difference - the ability to be truly engaged with a cause they care about. You are keeping your friends from feeling awesome.

It's important to always put yourself in the donor's shoes when you're fundraising. What is their motivation for giving? What is their connection to you or the organization? One way to do this is to always make your own donation before asking others to do so. Don't feel comfortable donating? Then reflect on what is keeping you from being completely confident in the organization and deal with that before you ask others to donate.

How many people will you need to ask? You will have to ask way more people than the number of gifts you need. If this wasn't true you could just ask 10 people for \$500 each and be able to raise \$5,000 right away. Generally, you would need four prospects to find one person to give the amount you're asking for and one to give a smaller amount. For example, you would need 204 prospects that lead to 51 donors to raise \$5,000 - with gifts ranging from under \$50 to \$500.

If you are asking members of your association, these ratios would be much lower as the mission of the Foundation will be familiar and members may know someone who has personally benefited from Foundation scholarships or other programming.

You need to be ok with some people saying no. It's going to happen if you need to ask more people than the gifts you need. Are they saying no to you personally? No. They might be all about saving puppies and kittens and you're asking them to support ending domestic violence. It's just not a good fit. Your cause and the causes they support don't align.

You can do research about your prospect's 3 Cs - Capacity, Connection, Commitment - to determine whether they have the capacity to give the amount you're asking for, a strong connection with either you or the organization, and a commitment to your cause in general. In the case of ending domestic violence, you would have a stronger prospect if they have already demonstrated support for related causes, like women's rights, abortion access, or feminism. If all of their philanthropy has been related to puppies and kittens, they would be a less likely prospect. But don't count them out entirely if you

have a strong relationship with them, especially if they have the capacity to make the size gift you need.

You don't have to ask everyone who comes to mind. After you've built up your confidence and had some success fundraising from people who are sympathetic to your cause, you might approach your rich uncle who completely disagrees with you politically. It's possible he'll give a gift in support of your efforts, but he's definitely a long shot. Don't let your angst about asking him stop you from asking all the other people you know who are genuinely interested and looking for ways to make a difference.

As [Kim Klein](#), nationally known fundraising expert and author, said, "If you want money, you have to ask for it. If you ask enough people, you will get it. The word you will hear most often is 'no' so your success depends on the number of people you ask. If no one has turned you down recently, it's because you haven't been asking enough. If you are afraid or uncomfortable asking for money, do it anyway. **What you believe in has to be bigger than what you are afraid of.**"

About Robbie Samuels

Prior to becoming recognized as a "networking expert" by *Inc.* and *Lifehacker*, and author of the best-selling business book *Croissants vs. Bagels: Strategic, Effective, and Inclusive Networking at Conferences* (available at [CroissantsvsBagels.com](#)) – Robbie was the Senior Manager of Events and Donor Engagement at a nonprofit in Boston for nearly a decade. Through this role, he oversaw 25 fundraising events a year that raised \$1million and was a relationship manager with a portfolio of over 200 major donors.

A professional member of the National Speakers Association, he has been speaking on the topic of inclusive and engaging connections for over a decade. He works with meeting professionals and conference organizers to design experiences that engage all participants, especially first-timers and those attending solo. Learn more about Art of the Schmooze, his signature talk, at [ArtoftheSchmooze.com](#).

As a consultant, coach, author, and speaker he shares how to shift your mindset around relationship building, so you discover new connections and business opportunities in the world around you – and know how to act on them. Listen to On the Schmooze podcast for more networking tips from Robbie and his interviews with talented leaders: [OntheSchmooze.com](#). Learn more about Robbie and his work at [RobbieSamuels.com](#).

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