

Philanthropy: Engaging the Next Generation

by Tony Myers, CFRE

“There is power in participation and participation in every respect; time, talent and treasure, no matter how small. Shame on us! Shame on all of us if we ever deny any client, any volunteer, any staff member, any board member, any patron or any donor the opportunity to give and to give often.”

Guy Mallabone, VP External Affairs, SAIT, Canada

Philanthropy, the next generation is about access to attitude, about the excitement of examples that enthuse and it is ultimately, about the power of participation.

Participation, explains Mack Jones, CFRE, Director of St. Peter’s College, South Australia, begins with us as fundraisers. “Australia, faces a dramatic demographic change with a longer-living, aging population and the subsequent, transfer of massive intergenerational wealth – it is the role of professional fundraisers to enthuse (write), motivate (speak) and ASK (directly) the community to facilitate its ‘desire for a better world’.”

As we all embark upon the largest transfer of inter-generational wealth in our history, many of us are demanding more of ourselves and at the same time we are asking questions of about the next generation --

- Will they be as generous?
- Have they learned the lessons about giving? If not, how will they learn those lessons?
- What is our role as fundraising professionals? And if we have a role, how do we exercise it?
- Do we fully understand the beliefs and passions of the next generation?

Not always!

A Tale of Next Generation Generosity

“I came to the realization that contemporary generations tend to discredit the generations that follow them,” says Phil Schumacher, CFRE, and Executive Director of the Gundersen Lutheran Medical Foundation in Wisconsin. “From succeeding generations come societal and

civic leaders and contributing participants. In fact, when asked to participate and to lead each generation has a full compliment of participants.”

Schumacher recently ran a campaign for a community based cancer centre and solicited 40,000 households with no prior giving history to his charity. A significant undertaking on its own; but listen to this. “To our surprise and delight” says Schumacher “the highest frequency of pledge and size came from the population between the ages of 25 to 39.”

And here is the kicker. “This was,” he concludes, “a segment we almost decided to remove from the process. Their pledge fulfillment remains high and matches other age groups.”

Schumacher’s example tells us the next generation is ready to give. And this is as true in Australasia as it is in the United States. The Australian consulting firm of O’Keefe and Partners reports that members of Generation X “are predominately single and have money to spend.”

But will the next generation of donors be as generous? “Yes,” exclaims Kathy Dodds who has worked at the University of Canberra and the University of South Australia. “However,” she is quick to add, “they are going to want to be asked differently. We are seeing a strong interest in making large contributions in small size bites on a monthly basis. They are more willing go give out their credit card numbers and banking information to make their philanthropic gifts quickly and conveniently as possible.”

Then how do engage the next generation in Australia and around the world?

Engaging through Great Examples

“The secret to success is emphasizing the community aspect of what we do and telling stories that move and inspire younger people,” says Sheldon Oleksyn, a senior development officer working in post secondary education in western Canada

Mack Jones offers this great baby boomer example that may well inspire the next generation. “One evening after dinner I was telephoning past students attempting to encourage them to attend an upcoming reunion dinner to be held in Brisbane. After several calls I found myself speaking to a wheat farmer who lived on the Queensland New South Wales boarder some four hundred kilometres to the southwest.

“During the course of our conversation the farmer explained that for the previous three years he had lived in drought conditions and that his recently sown (fifth) crop now looked like failing too.

“We talked of his affection for his old school, of classroom memories and the headmasters of his era. He went on to explain that while he lived on a diet of mutton and potatoes he had neither the fuel nor the funds to travel the five hours to Brisbane to attend the dinner and in truth could not have paid for the telephone call we were having. Our conversation lasted fifteen or twenty minutes and I moved on to a few more calls before bed.

“A week latter I received an envelope in the mail. My name and address were written neatly in biro and on the reverse the name of a wheat farm way out west. Inside the envelope was a brief, formal note, thanking me for the invitation to attend a reunion dinner and a five dollar note to be directed to the school building fund.”

“As practitioners,” says Oleksyn, “we need to invite people to participate in philanthropy no matter what the size or scope of the gift. Giving needs to be started early and valued for its practice and not for its monetary value. Like every generation before it, the current generation will develop its philanthropic attitudes based on the example of influential people in their lives and in particular, their parents and family.”

“My only exposure (to giving) had been the collection box at church and usually my Dad would pass me a few coins to put in it,” says Bruno Yvanovich, former Executive Director, Development, The Australian National University. “I am very optimistic even from merely observing my kids and their friends. They are all socially aware and interested in the world. They have a strong social conscience. I think the growing market for regular monthly giving through face-to-face solicitation, which my daughter recently signed up for, will mean a growing group of your givers.”

Kenn Manville, who operates his consulting firm in New Brunswick, Canada, provides other examples. “Many in this (next) generation look to their cultural idols for inspiration. Bono, the charismatic singer with the Irish band U2, is a good example of one who is diligently working to inspire. His leadership in convincing government to forgive third world debt, and invest in AIDS relief in Africa has earned him two Nobel peace prize nominations.”

Great examples come from great people, some well known, other not so well known.

Drawing on experiences and examples helps donors connect to their own philanthropic views and values and ultimately gets communicated to the next generation. It is our experiences and our stories that inspire and nurture the next generation to seek substantive and profound philanthropic opportunities. Awareness of these views often comes through participation and conversation. So whose responsibility is it to initiate participation and conversation?

Participation and Conversation

Fundraising professionals have a responsibility to continue to invite the next generation to participate in philanthropy by using their time, talent and resources. What we really need to be about, is “inviting participation.” That is what will draw the next generation.

John Maddock, President and CEO of Box Hill Institute, TAFE offers two inspiring stories of next generation participation. “First, (Box Hill students) are assisting our local Rotary club over a three year period to raise \$360,000 for cancer research, and the second is the commitment of a similar group to not only raise funds to build a house for homeless youth but also to involving apprentices actually building the house and handing it over to the Homeless Youth Foundation.”

Participation goes hand in hand with conversation. When we extend the hand of welcome we do so by engaging donors in activity and conversation about what is important to them. In their research on “*Origins of Giving ... Affairs of the Heart*” with donors, Tony Myers and Scott Decksheimer (with the help of colleague DD Coutts) created a conversation model, a model that focuses interactions with donors in a meaningful way.

Ask yourself this. In your last interaction with next generation donors which of these questions did you pose as you engaged them?

- You know, I don’t think I’ve ever asked you why you volunteer with us. I’d be really interested in hearing your answer to that question. Why do you volunteer with us?
- You’re serving as a committee member for us and you’re giving us your valuable time. I’m not sure I’ve ever asked you why you are doing this, and I would be interested in knowing.

- I understand that you've come on as a donor with us. I never want to lose an opportunity to say thank you to a donor. Thank you. (pause) I wonder if you would consider sharing with me why you donate to us?
- I've heard there is a strong connection between gifts we've received and our willingness to give. Is there any connection in your experience to important gifts you've received throughout your life, and your willingness today to give so generously to us?

Simone Joyaux is the champion of conversation. In her book *Strategic Fund Development: Building Profitable Relationships that Last* she extols with passion the value of questioning, and of course, hand in hand with questioning, is the power of listening.

There are few rewards as satisfying as listening to a volunteer or a donor talk about what is meaningful in their lives; what they are passionate about. There are so few things we can do in our work that have the power of conversion as strong as the affirmation that comes from listening. In many ways it is the ultimate gift we give to those who support our cause.

In summary

So what will bring the next generation of donors to us?

They will come to us based on our *attitude* towards them and our belief in their abilities. They will come to us based on the examples we set and the *examples* we present. They will come to us as a result of the opportunities for *participation and engagement* we provide to them as volunteers, as advisors and as donors.

At the end of the day, after we do all we do as professionals, they will come to us because they are invited. They will come to us because they are asked.

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