

(You may need to zoom in to read the full article)

Which question would you like to hear the least: Would you like to have your appendix removed without anesthesia? Would you give a motivational speech to a group of 200, right now? Or, would you run our annual campaign this year? All three questions usually elicit the same response: "No thanks, not me. I really can't do that right now (which means that I really can't do that ever).

Why? Why does the thought of running an annual campaign for your school send the same wave of fear through you as having your appendix removed by the students in the sixth-grade biology class? For starters, few of us have been trained in the art and science of fund raising. As professional doctors, lawyers, teachers, carpenters, or anything else, we are trained before we begin work. Fund raising, on the other hand, is often done by well-meaning volunteers who believe in their heart of hearts that because they mean well and because the cause is good, people will naturally support it. Regrettably, this is as true for an annual campaign at a Montessori school as it is for almost any other fund-raising effort.

Another fear factor is that none of us wants to fail and most of us believe that fund raising today is more difficult than it was a few years ago because there is less philanthropic money available. Please believe me, there is more money available today than ever before. What has decreased is the number of not-for-profit organizations which have closed their doors thinking there was less money available.

What's more, we are most often inextricably tied to what has been done before. And worst of all, we know that it will take hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteer hours to plan, organize, and finally implement our campaign; and for what? A few thousand dollars? Most people I know who have run annual campaigns would prefer to just write a check for a few thousand dollars and forget this year's effort altogether. Am I striking a chord?

Fund raising for our schools is necessary: It builds new buildings, buys new books and computers, pays teachers' and administrators' salaries, keeps the electricity and phones working, and meets a host of other annual demands that are simply not met by tuition.

Begin your annual campaign by deciding exactly how the money you raise will be spent. Think about the future of your school, because people only invest in the future. They do not give to the

Annual Campaign or Annual Pain?

By Barry Nickelsberg



past. Here's something really important to remember: Your school has no needs; it only offers opportunities. You must determine the needs of the parents and grandparents of the children in your school. You should also determine the needs of the alumni and then the needs of the business community and other potential donors within the area that you serve. Then decide how your school can meet those needs. Exclusivity, recognition, and joining a winner are just a few of "their" needs.

Everyone likes supporting the best. It is a fund-raising axiom that nothing breeds success like success. Montessori schools are known for providing superb educational experiences. That appeals to everyone.

No matter what you have done for an annual campaign in the past, whether it was an auction, a spaghetti dinner for the masses, a picnic, a concert, or anything else, this year, plan something new. The fact that it is different from anything you have done before will pique the curiosity and interest of people.

One suggestion is to begin a campaign by having the head of the school speak to a group of eight to ten parents at one of the parents' homes. These dinners should be scheduled about one every other evening for two weeks where, after a nice dinner, the future of the school can be discussed in detail,

parents' questions can be answered, and then those parents can be given the opportunity to provide substantial support. Each of the parents should be invited to join the President's Club, or the Chairman's Circle, or whatever you want to call it. For \$500 they become more than a friend of the school, they become a partner in providing the best possible education for our children and for our future.

Set a goal somewhat higher than you have achieved in the past and let people know that it is an ambitious, but achievable, goal. Also, for those who are becoming a part of this "club" of \$500 donors, that this year's annual campaign will yield outstanding results for the school. Let them know that they need not part with any of their money until at least 75% of the goal has been committed. Their commitments will allow for similar commitments from others. Once that ball is rolling, the momentum will carry your campaign to a successful conclusion.

After 75% or more has been committed, announce to the school population, parents, grandparents, friends, and anyone else you can think of, that you are only 25% away from reaching your goal. At that point, invite everyone to participate in the campaign's success. Now is the time for your benefit concert, your bake sale, or whatever it is that gets everyone involved and becomes a celebration of the success of the campaign.

Annual campaigns can be fun. Plan carefully, focus on the future, raise most of your money from a handful of sources, and no matter how successful something was in the past, change the routine to keep people (volunteers) active, interested, involved, and committed.

Barry Nickelsberg is the Executive Director of The Funding Center of Alexandria, Virginia, a not-for-profit organization that works with other not-for-profits worldwide to help them raise money. In the past twelve years, The Funding Center has worked with hundreds of organizations, including schools, to raise over \$300 million. Mr. Nickelsberg is also the father of a third-year primary student.

Does your school have a fund-raising tip of success story you would like to share with others? Please let us hear from you.

Tomorrow's Child

4157 Mountain Road, Box 246
Pasadena, MD 21122
Phone/Fax: 410-360-9674