

Fundraising: Giver, Beware!

Don't be a ministry zombie and give on impulse.

For most churches and ministries across the country, fundraising is a vital tool used to raise money necessary to make ministry happen. People need to understand that without financial support significant outreach would be nearly impossible for these organizations.

But in many cases, the tail is starting to wag the dog, with some ministries focusing more on raising money than on doing ministry.

Fundraising has evolved into a massive business, spawning financial consultants, direct-response companies, fulfillment houses, telemarketers and more. Helping ministries raise money is an industry in itself!

The so-called personal letter you receive each month was probably not written by the ministry leader whose name appears at the bottom of the page but by a direct-mail strategist, and it was undoubtedly designed by a graphic artist to get you to respond.

Color scheme, spacing, layout and structure are some of the most important features of monthly letters. The most effective fundraisers can even predict how readers will respond based on the color of the envelope used. And they mail letters on just the right day each month so they will arrive when readers get their paychecks.

Statistics prove that if a mailer is just a few days late, the response to it will drop considerably. I've seen people get fired from ministries because they mailed the monthly letter 48 hours to 72 hours behind schedule. It's considered that important.

In fact, I spoke to one “Christian” fundraiser who said the single most important thing is getting a person to open an envelope and that he would be willing to do anything to make that happen—even if it meant lying about what was inside.

It’s important to note that I’m not against fundraising when it’s done with integrity. There are some marvelous ministries out there doing great work because of effective relationships with their supporters and partners. But I do think you need to know how it all works because believe me, it’s a business, and they’re trying to work you.

Here are some things to consider when you get your next fundraising letter:

»They’ve timed your letter to arrive when you have the most money in the bank. Giving will be easier for you, but that shouldn’t control your decision.

»The cute little underlines, exclamation points and arrows that look as if the writer inserted them with a pen after it was written weren’t made by a person. They were made with a computer. Each mark was strategically placed for effect.

»The amount of the “suggested gift” on the reply envelope was calculated by a computer based on your past giving history and often with the goal of nudging you to give a little more.

»The free items, or “Jesus junk,” the ministry offers you get results! You’re more likely to give if you expect to receive something in return.

Sadly, we wouldn’t even need fundraising if Christians would give as the Bible teaches. So am I suggesting that we stop fundraising? Absolutely not.

As I said before, great ministries are influencing the world because good people give. Plus, many gifted fundraising experts are ethical and operate with the utmost integrity.

But I am suggesting we become informed givers. Don’t be a ministry zombie and give on impulse—for any reason. Give

because you've researched a ministry, believe in what it's doing in the world, and have confirmed its integrity and track record. Then pray about the gift. Giving for any other reason is usually a waste of money.

Phil Cooke, Ph.D., is a media consultant to ministries worldwide. His new book, *Branding Faith: Why Some Churches and Non-Profits Impact the Culture and Others Don't*. Find out more at .