

The Art of the Ask

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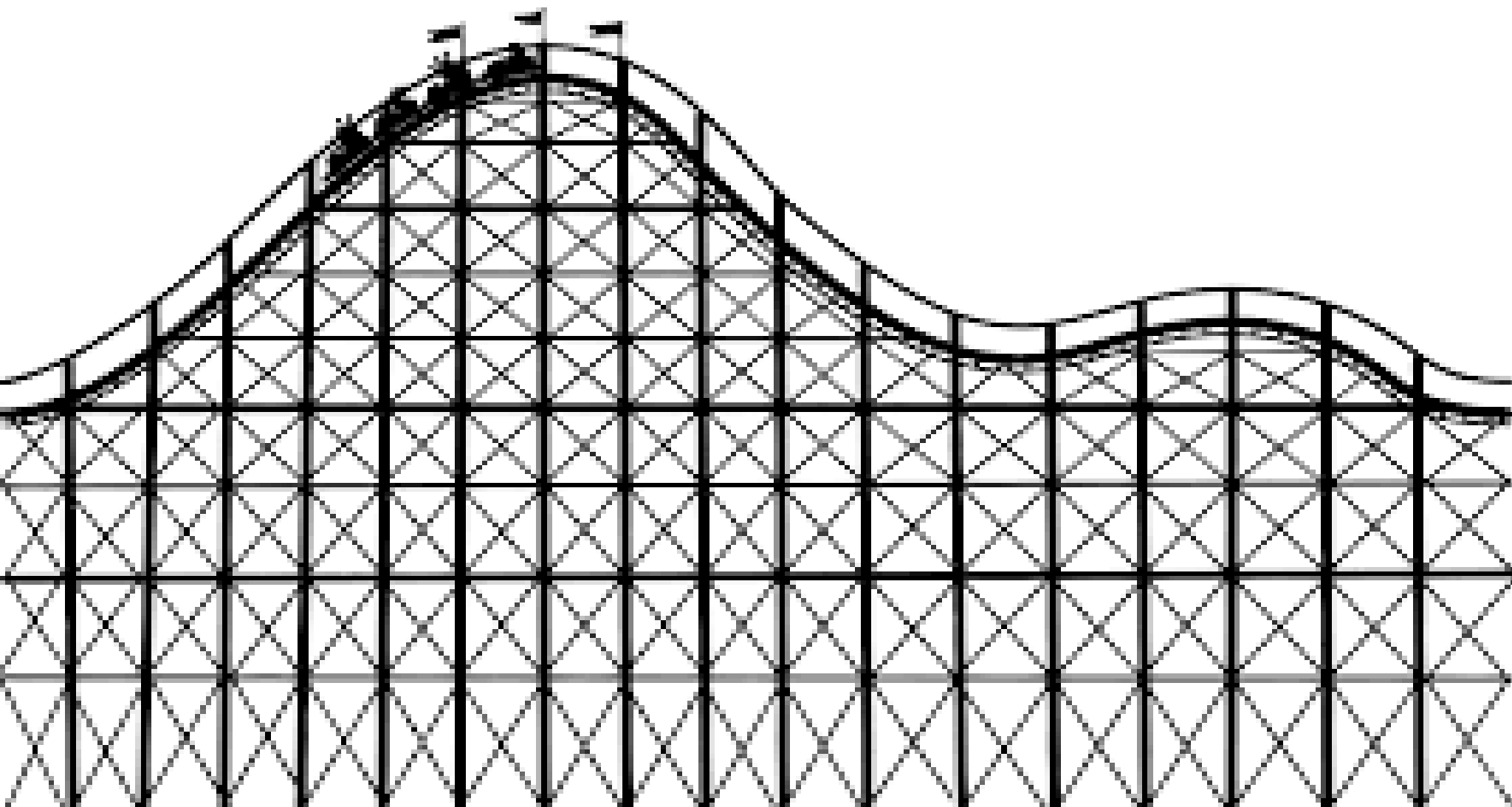
Some days you feel like this in Major Gifts



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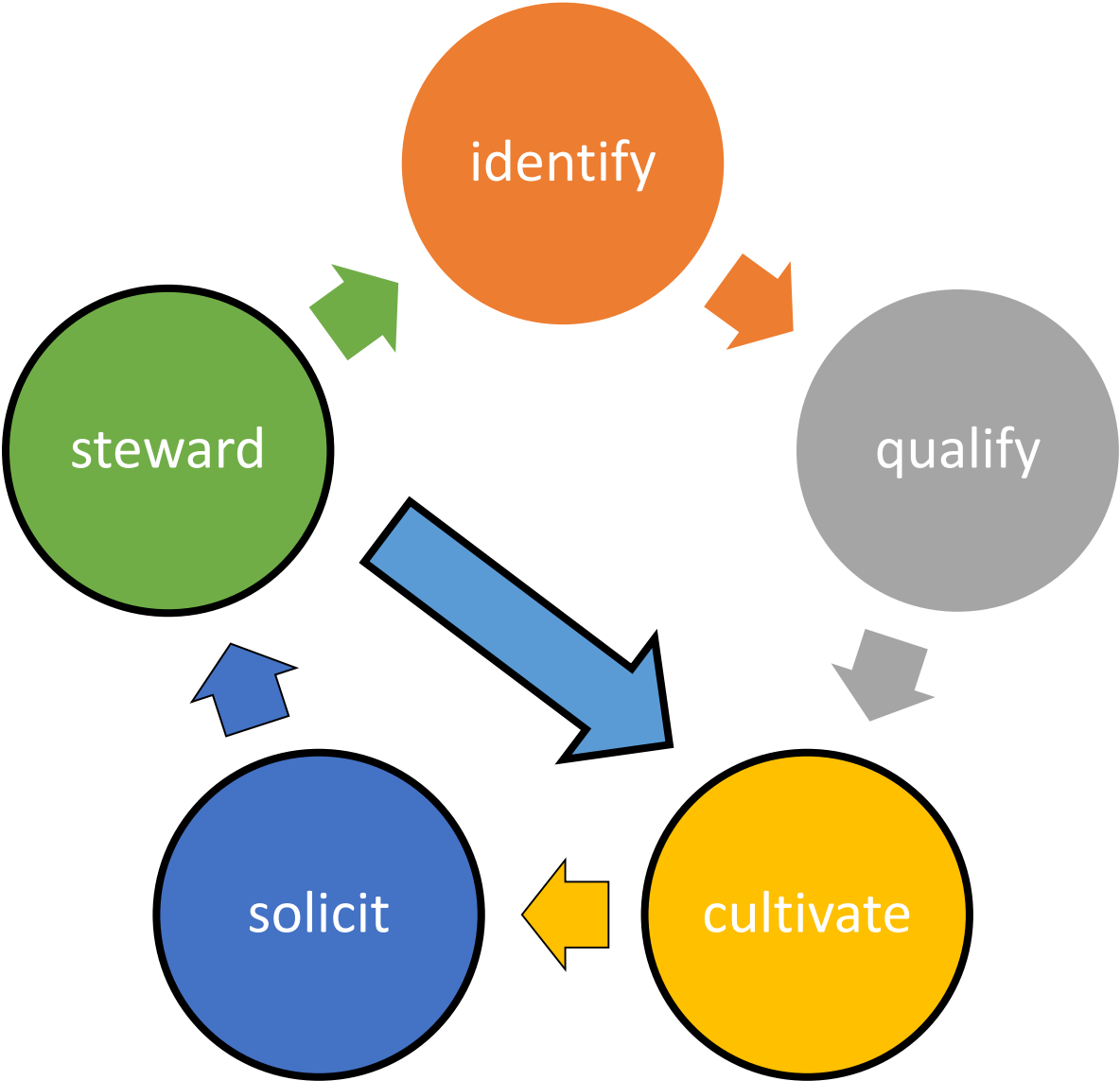
But mostly, it's really like this:



Goals of the session

- To help you understand what constitutes a major gift
- To help you understand the key pieces needed to solicit and land a major gift (and get it again)
- To help you focus your resources to best engage and direct your donor prospects towards a major gift
- Engage in role playing to help understand both how donors and solicitors approach the major gift ask

Giving Cycle



What is a Major Gift?

- Institutional perspective - Annual Fund vs Campaign
- Donor perspective – Current and Future
- Golden Rule

Before you make the ask – tools you need

- **Case** – compelling, concise, answers “so what”, tailored to donor
- **Research** – do you know as much as possible? Leave room for discovery in the meeting
- **People** – are you the right person? If not, bring the right person. Be selfless
- **Planning and Timing** – balance your schedule with the donor’s

Do you have the right case?

- Institutional – WHY
- Donor - WHY
- Importance of a comprehensive cultivation, solicitation and stewardship plan – dates and steps (PS you don't need Tessitura)
- Balance institutional needs with donor interests/needs
- And remember...

Pssst – it's not your money!



Do you have the right information?

- Do as much research as practical before an ask
- Be open to gathering information and discovering when you are making the ask – and be prepared to change course
- Key to asking for the appropriate amount and appropriate time

Resources for major donor prospect research

- **Ask your board, colleagues (ticket office!)**
- Google, LinkedIn, Business Journals
- County Records
- DIY gift listing from Annual Reports
- SEC filings through EDGAR
- Real estate info through Zillow
- Paid prospect databases: iWave, ResearchPoint, Hoovers

Fail to Plan? Plan to Fail!

- Start of season (or end of season)
- Plan for each qualified prospect
- Cultivation - 1-6 months (sometimes up to 18 months); 3-7 “touches”
- Solicitation – right time and place with right people
- Stewardship – deliver benefit if any, follow up with results, and then structured non-transactional contact every 2-3 months (phone, email, purposeful conversation at a concert, meal).

Timing is everything

- Have you developed your relationship to the point where you feel comfortable asking
- Do you know what else is going on in the donor's life (family, trips, business transactions)
- Is there any reason that would prevent you from asking today
- Strike while the iron is hot
- Is there a wrong time to ask?
- Vision is motivating – Neediness and desperation is not – and damages future asks

Getting the appointment

- They know why you are calling – be straightforward
- Is email ever appropriate?
- Go to meet them, never make them come to you
- What about the pre-concert dinner?
- Call the day before to confirm

Do you have the right people in the meeting

- Are you the right person (should be determined in your planning)
- Are you the right person alone?
- Do you need to bring someone from Artistic? The ED? The MD?
- **Focus on the needs of the donor**

Pre-meeting Preparation

- Write a script
- Meet with volunteer immediately before the meeting to go over the plan (send brief in advance if a complex ask)
- Know who is laying the groundwork and who is asking – be explicit
- Have a conversation about comfortability – let your volunteer know that they can “throw” to you if they feel out of sorts or not right
- Be ready to step in and ask for the \$\$ if your volunteer can't put the pin in

Location Location Location

- Quiet - home or restaurant
- Comfortable – for the donor – go to them
- Unhurried – make sure you arrive in good time and have a cushion in case things go long. There is nothing more important than this meeting and must certainly NEVER leave to attend an internal meeting. Those can wait.

Meeting structure

- Thank you. Always first, always genuine
- Conversational, enquiring, solicitous – follow their lead, ask questions
- Pick up on cues and follow them if need be
- Limit your alcohol intake. You need to be nimble
- If conversation does not take you to place of ask naturally, you'll need to be forthright towards what feels like the natural end of the meeting

The Ask

- Start with a thank you – appreciation
- Acknowledge how important certain part of organization is to them
- What you have been able to do with past support from this individual
- Outline the plans for the future, and how their support will make this possible. Make sure their gift has a tangible effect.
- Ask to renew or increase gift
- Say thank you again!

How should I ask?

Be direct and be genuine

Be respectful

Invite them to support something they love or enjoy

Example!

Go where angels fear to tread

- If you are well prepared, there is no “No”
- Not that much
- Not now

- Even when you get a No, there is information – why they are unhappy with a program, how the organization is managed – it’s all information you can use for stewardship (solve a problem, demonstrate responsiveness, then next ask – increase!)

Piece of cake, right?



If it's so easy, why doesn't everyone do it?

- Fear of rejection or failure
- Fear of asking
- Fear of reciprocal ask

Recap → Break → Dealing with Objections

- Know your prospect
- Connect your ask with your prospect's interests
- Know what you are asking for
- Plan, prepare and practice
- Steward immediately!

Making the ask and dealing with objections

- By far the two things that people fear the most are
 1. Asking and getting a flat no
 2. Asking and getting an objection
- We are going to demonstrate 6 different objections and how to recover.

Objection 1 - Too Much!

- That's too much money!
- That's a lot of money
- You've mistaken me for Bill Gates

Response to Objection 1

- **Soft lob**
- **Break it up**
- **Press the point**
- **Apologize**

Objection 2 – Wrong Program

- I don't know why you are asking me to support that program. I don't even like/agree with/fund
 - Contemporary music
 - Educational programs
 - Community programming
 - A particular artist or instrument

Response to Objection 2

- **Apologize, redirect and re-ask**

Objection 3 - Complaint

- I don't like modern/contemporary/Baroque music!
Why do you play so much of it!?

Responses to Objection 3

- **Empathize and explain**
- **Empathize, get an answer and get back to them**
- **Ask a redirecting question – change the subject**

Objection 4 – Either / Or

- I can't do the Annual Fund and the Campaign – you tell me which is most important and that's where I'll put my money

Response to Objection 4

- **Explain and offer options to do both**

Objection 5 – Not now

- Now is not a good time for me
 - Family problems, health
 - Stock market
 - Job issues/uncertainty

Responses to Objection 5

- **Empathize and support**
- **Probe about a right time**
- **Back off completely if sounds catastrophic**

Objection 6 - Conditional

- I'll contribute if you can change my seating
- I'll contribute if you stop posting deficits
- I'll contribute if you program my favorite composer
- I'll contribute if you program my composition

Responses to Objection 6

- **Repeat and understand**
- **Repeat and explain**
- **Repeat and go multi year**
- **Punt!**

Successful Asks:
What is your story?

Thanking & Stewardship: Keep donors connected!

- 24-hour thank you letter
- Thank you phone call from board/sr. staff/orchestra
- Backstage receptions, On-stage rehearsals, Conducting a rehearsal
- Mailed card from orchestra members
- Regular newsletters and reporting
- Excellent customer service, organization wide is essential