

Respecting Our Seniors' Perspective

Some of my best friends are seniors. Tom Brokaw calls seniors "America's greatest generation." Indeed, most of our best planned giving prospects have lived through one World War (if not two) and the Great Depression. Much has been written about seniors in our culture, the period in which they grew up and how they view the world today.

To a large extent, our senior generation developed strict guidelines for themselves regarding work, social interactions and faith. As a result, they were a hard-working people and considerably conservative in their social and political views. For every dollar they earned, they saved 20 cents. A handshake was a promise. Religious involvement was — and is — important.

So how does this viewpoint manifest itself as they contemplate a planned gift, and what should our posture be as we work with them?

Financially Conservative

First, for many seniors the notion of spending money and paying taxes is a big deal! This group of people pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and made their own way by being creative, resourceful and entrepreneurial. Many seniors today have saved tremendous amounts of money because they intentionally chose a lifestyle significantly below their means.

When I meet a planned giving prospect for the first time, I'm often interviewed. They're interested to know whether (on credit) I drive a high-end car, wear a fancy watch or live in a large home on the hill with a three-car garage. So my car is intentionally older; I bought my watch on TV; and my home is fairly modest by most standards. Seniors want to know that giving to your charitable organization doesn't facilitate a lifestyle for you — or me — that dramatically exceeds their own.

Desire for Simplicity

Second, handshakes and promises don't work very well in planned giving. I am often flabbergasted by the number of agreements in duplicate, disclosure statements, deposit forms, W-9s and so forth that have to be completed at the outset of a planned giving agreement. Imagine how a senior person must feel when they are going through all the gift annuity paperwork for the first time — and they don't like paperwork to begin with! What should we do?

Read each document thoroughly yourself first. This will increase your own learning, while at the same time help you explain to your donor what each document contains. Also, be sure to speak clearly at what may feel like a slower pace. Don't rush through the paperwork as a formality. I've watched that happen before — and the effect on seniors is not good.

Well-Honed Viewpoints

Finally, even if you don't share similar religious or political views, remem-

ber to respect your donor's viewpoint. They've worked hard, and lived a long and often financially productive life. They just might have a pearl of wisdom or two that we need to hear!

— Gene Christian

Widows, Wealth and Giving

Did you know that, according to the Federal Reserve Board, women now control 51.3 percent of the personal wealth in the United States? And that, according to the United States Census Bureau, almost half of all women over 65 are widows, totaling 8.4 million — four times the 1.9 million widowers?

Widows are certainly a large segment of your planned gift prospect pool. Therefore, when you are beginning your planned giving program, you should pay close attention to the widows on your prospect and donor list.

Often these women are thrust into the role of managing sizable estates. In fact, Kelly Boston of Merrill Lynch estimates 85 to 90 percent of women are left in charge of their family's affairs. What can you do to help them achieve their charitable interests?

Reaching Out

1. *Don't automatically remove them from your mailing list.* Once their husband has died, many women find themselves cut off from their shared interests. Continuing to contact them

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