

For the Love of People

BY K. GENE CHRISTIAN

Planned giving. In spite of the year just completed, what a wonderful career choice! For the most part, we spend our days helping intelligent, reasonably wealthy people (and their professional advisors), find creative ways to support a myriad of noble and worthy causes. The government likes what we do (reference section 664 of the Internal Revenue Code); prospective donors and their advisors appreciate the service(s) we provide; and our employers have witnessed endowment coffers burgeon in recent years because of our work. There aren't too many career choices that offer so very little downside!

However, there is an element of planned giving that I hadn't bargained for . . . an area within the "biz" that I had never considered . . . something every one of us who are committed to this profession long-term most ponder. . . .

What is it? Stewardship.

I've always loved the "thrill of the hunt." Translation: I like honing marketing plans that focus on ever-increasing market penetration. I enjoy meeting new people. I am energized by difficult, twisty transactions that require lots of thought and effort to get done. In short, I relish deal-making and all the time and effort required on the front end to "book" additional life-income arrangements and bequests each year.

The problem is this: If you're committed to stay with an organization long enough, your planned giving program will likely round into form and begin to show signs of maturity. How will you know? When the number of phone calls you receive from existing life-income donors with questions, health problems, or family dynamic issues exceeds the number of inquiries you get from prospects (and/or the professionals who advise them).

Each year our organization "books" several dozen new life-income arrangements (a lot by some standards, paltry by others). However, as the base of donors grows we necessarily begin to tip the scales of energy and focus from getting deals done to stewarding our existing base.

This isn't an optional course; it's mandatory. Virtually all of your life-income donors came to rely on you as trustworthy, accurate and proactive in completing a gift arrangement with them. So, they will naturally expect no less once

the deal is done. Unlike unthoughtful family members, you can't simply ignore your life-income donors! The 1099s have to be sent, re-valuations and income proformas completed and communicated, payment checks often delivered and so forth. In most cases, we're locked into a relationship with these people for the balance of their lifetimes!

How do you respond when the phone rings and one of your donors has fallen in the barn and thinks his hip is broken? Or, when Gertrude (who trusts you more than a family member) wants to talk about growing anxiety over husband Bill's forgetfulness? Or, when Wilma just returns from her blood work and the results aren't good? Or, when Pete doesn't have family members to trust executorship with and that's why he's calling you? Or . . . well, you get the idea.

For me, the revelation has been that planned giving is increasingly about people and their life's issues. The question I've had to ask myself recently is, "How much capacity do I have to care about, and in some ways care for, other people?"

If you enjoy stewarding these relationships, and do it well, what you'll find is potentially as much new planned giving activity from your existing base of support as you do from brand new donors. Planned giving isn't just about crunching numbers and doing six- and seven-figure deals.

As thousands of new life-income arrangements get completed every year in America, it should increasingly be — for all of us — a business about caring for, and ultimately loving, mostly older people. ♦

WRITE US

PGT readers are invited to respond to articles appearing in the newsletter by writing a "Letter to the Editor." Articles, news, humorous anecdotes, marketing samples and other items of interest to the planned giving community are also welcome.

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