

# Start with the Donors' Dreams

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*Tuesday, March 28, 2023 | 10:30 am | Room: United B*

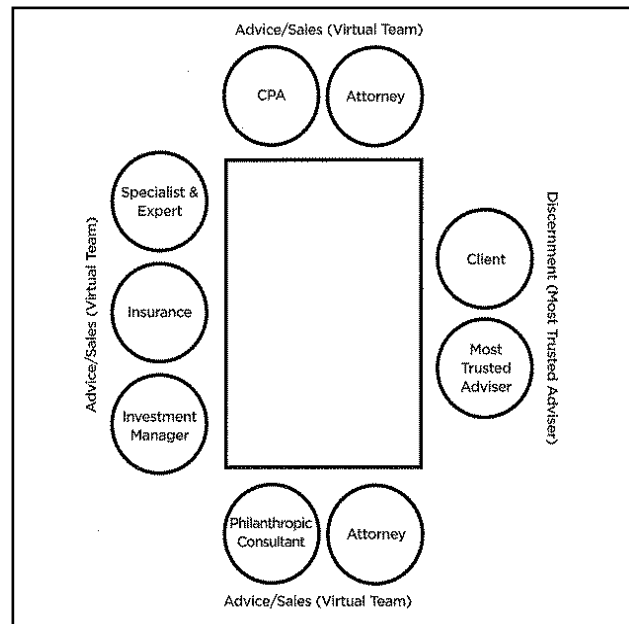
## I. It's not about you:

This learning experience is about Raising Money. It's for ministry leaders (The president, CEO, or any person who is in charge of making sure the mission survives, especially through communicating that mission to the board and supporters) and fundraisers (especially relational fundraisers who spend time communicating with your ministry's most important donors). You have been entrusted with the organization's mission, and you want significant donors to trust your organization with the financial resources God has given them.

I hope you have a well-crafted Mission Statement. It's clear that people give to missions they believe in. But most people in your position are much better at talking about YOUR Mission, than helping your current and potential donors talk about THEIR Mission.

Long ago, I came to the realization that people don't want to give to MY vision, my dream. They want to achieve the dreams God entrusted to them.

In [The Right Side of the Table](#), by Scott and Todd Fithian, a book used to train of many charitable advisors, the authors teach that many wealth holders surround themselves with advisors. As a Christian leader, have you been frustrated that advisors also act as gatekeepers? Have you hired your own experts in charitable gift planning, but found that your experts don't really compete with the experts the wealth holders already employ? These authors have found that helping wealth holders find the true purpose of their wealth is the most important advisory skill.



You have the advantage in this area over attorneys, CPAs, investment managers, and similar professionals. Most ministers, ministry leaders, and fundraisers were born with, or have developed, exceptional people skills. Your faith helps you focus on the deeper questions of meaning. I remember one MBA describing his plan with “if I die.” When I explained that there’s no “if” in that sentence, things got serious.

We practice delivering the perfect case for supporting our ministry. Every person in your position should know your [elevator pitch](#). Yet it’s much more important to listen. To help potential transformational donors explore their deeper questions, [their personal mission](#). As Fithian and Fithian write, “To help wealth holders find the true intent for their wealth requires deep discovery, skillful discovery.” If they can accomplish [their mission with a gift to your organization](#), they’ll make the gift. If their heart is focused somewhere else ([Matthew 6:19-21](#)), their treasure won’t go to your organization no matter how well you craft your appeal.

Questions about meaning and motivations are the closest questions to your donors’ hearts. The advisors who help them address “the meaning question” – whether that’s an attorney, tax specialist, investment managers, or philanthropic consultant - will deliver the greatest service. Referring to the picture of the table, the person who delivers the most important advice often becomes the “Most Trusted Adviser,” who is “the individual who is selected on purpose by the wealth holder to oversee all of their affairs and all of their advisers.”

We’ve all quoted [James 4:2](#), “You do not have, because you do not ask.” (ESV) [James 4:3-10](#) points to asking from the right motive, and living in humility. Is your main motive to solve the problem Jesus’ name, or to have your name associated with the solution? Can you elevate the mission above your personal brand? If you can listen to their passion and help them fulfill their personal missions, they will fund the mission, and thank you for giving them the opportunity.

Here’s a simple, two-step process to help donors understand their philanthropic vision. Once they identify their dream, they’ll employ their financial resources to reach it.

## **II. Start with their personal history:**

Ask questions. Allow them to share their histories. Wait for their answers. Use your two ears twice as much as your one mouth.

Ask if you can take notes. This shows you're paying attention.

I've heard a thousand donors tell how they were able to attend a school through a scholarship, but it's a special story to each person. The donor's story selection tells you about their philanthropic interests.

Other stories are about an important family member with a problem, some past victory, or something that makes them mad. An attorney I know asks people to take a newspaper and circle the stories that provoke the most joy and anger before he discusses where they want to direct the resources they have been entrusted with over their lifetimes, also known as their estates.

### **III. Focus on their vision for the future:**

A colleague who was the chief fundraiser for the business school at the university I served as director of planned giving introduced me to a business professor in order to close a \$25,000 gift annuity. I asked him what he wanted to accomplish with the gift. He told us that he and his wife had led a group to study in Italy each summer. He lit up when talking about the impact of that trip, and other international programs of the school. Then he said, "Our Dean has implemented faculty exchanges, student exchanges and other similar programs. We want to help fund all aspects of the school's international programs." I had to say, "a \$25,000 gift annuity can't accomplish that." So he replied, "actually, we're considering eventually putting \$2,000,000 into the fund."

There's a danger in trying to close a gift too quickly. You can miss the big picture, and the big gift. Linger on the motivation, the "why" of a potential gift. Even when you're reviewing the final gift agreement, make sure to focus on the "Purpose." Most big gifts are not a person's final gift.

What's the benefit of starting with – and focusing on – the donors' dreams? You probably already know that most donors aren't interested in giving a million dollars to your ministry. But there are people who have been entrusted with a vision or mission by God, and some of them will give all they have to accomplish that dream. They'll make an investment of the entire fortune God has entrusted to them to fulfill the mission God put on their heart. Is your organization willing to help them fulfill their dreams?

Dr. Scott Janney is the Territorial Director of Gift Planning for [The Salvation Army Eastern USA Territory](#), where he supervises a team of 28 fundraisers and staff who raise \$75 Million in Major and Planned Gifts each year. He is a graduate of Asbury University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Temple University.