



2011 ATHLETICS ADMINISTRATION

When you evaluate the effectiveness of your annual fund, who are you thinking about? If your answer is your annual fund officers and not your ticket staff, I would suggest you rethink that position.



Doug Knuth



The ticket office is the frontline of your organization and typically has more donor/prospect contact than your traditional development group. Consider the number of calls and personal visits your ticket office handles during the season ticket renewal period. How many of those calls and visits are with current or prospective donors? That's a trick question. The answer is every person your ticket office talks to is a current or prospective donor.

From a development perspective you can utilize the constant contact your ticket office has with donors and prospects to develop new annual fund revenue, support meaningful relationships with donors, qualify or build information about donors, and develop new leads for your development staff.

The concept of driving new revenue through the ticket office is relatively common. Most administrators focus on raising ticket prices or increasing ticket sales to enhance revenue. There are additional ways to increase revenue by thinking of your ticket operation as a member of your development team.

Every phone call to the ticket office should include a conversation about joining your annual fund or booster club. That conversation can be as simple as asking, "Do you know about the Crimson Club?" or, "Can I tell you how you can help our teams win?" Consider a conversation with a current donor and asking "I see you are a Crimson Club member, did you know you are only \$250 from the next membership level? Can I tell you about the next membership level and how that can help our teams win in the classroom and in competition?" Arming your frontline ticket staff with this information will generate new revenue for the department even when you aren't raising ticket prices or increasing ticket sales.

The frontline ticket staff also has the advantage of providing a service function that makes the donor feel grateful for additional tickets, improving a seat location or simply creating a positive ticket ordering experience. This relationship can lead to a free-flowing dialogue with your staff if they are trained to ask good questions and identify important information. The ticket staff has the ability to deepen the relationship and learn more about the donor in an exchange where the donor doesn't worry about being asked for money. How powerful would it be to ask simple questions to identify important wealth or giving capacity information? Would it seem out of place for a frontline ticket staffer to ask a customer "How was your summer?" "Did you and the family get away for vacation?" "Where do you go?" Is it crazy to think ticket staff can ask a customer about their day, "How is your day going?"

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"Is business good?" "Where do you work?" "What do you do?" Is it out of the ordinary to ask how the customer's family is doing, "I see you have six season tickets, do you bring family to games?" "How many kids do you have?" "Are there other graduates of the U in your family?"

These questions are simple in building a relationship with the customer and vital toward building a file of information about the donor. Imagine if the answers to the questions were, "This summer we brought our family to one of our vacation homes in the south of France ... Business is tough, one of our smaller warehouses had a fire, luckily no one was hurt but half of the staff, roughly 300 people, have to go on leave while we rebuild ... We have four kids, each graduated from the U and they fight over who gets to use my season tickets." The information gained in this conversation is invaluable to the development process. We learned this customer has multiple vacation homes, owns a large business with multiple warehouses and thousands of employees, has children who graduated from the U who don't have season tickets in their own name. Powerful stuff.

How do you get to this point? First you have to rethink how you perceive your ticket staff. Make them part of your development team, involve them in development training sessions, create opportunities for collaboration, recognize and reward development success in your ticket office.

Second, share information constantly with development and ticket staff. Make sure your ticket staff knows as much about your donors as your development staff. Share stories as a group about meetings and phone conversations with donors. Talk about opportunities and strategies for cultivation or solicitation. You will be shocked how much your ticket staff knows about your donors and prospects.

If you want your annual fund revenue to grow, and who doesn't, be sure to recognize the impact your ticket staff can have on your annual fund results. A unified development and ticket operation will have an immediate positive impact on customer service and revenue.

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