

The Crucial Role of Silence When Asking for a Gift

by [Andy Robinson](#)



By now, we all know the importance of asking a donor for a specific amount—“I’m hoping you’ll be able to join us with a gift of \$500.” That’s challenging enough for most of us, but here’s something even harder: asking for a contribution and then remaining silent.

Novice solicitors tend to stammer out the number and immediately start to backpedal before the prospect has a chance to consider the request. If you’re not careful, your mouth will open against your will and all sorts of inappropriate comments will come out.

- *“I know that’s a lot of money. You really don’t have to give that much.”*
- *“I know this is a bad time for you, because it’s certainly a bad time for me.”*
- *“You don’t have to decide right now.”*
- *“Of course, if you’re as broke as I am, there’s no way you could even consider a gift of that size.”*
- *“I’d like to crawl under a rock and die from embarrassment. Care to join me?”*

Let’s look past your discomfort for a moment and enter the mind of the prospect. Because of your transparent approach, this person knows—long before the meeting—the purpose of your visit and roughly how much money you’re seeking. He or she will be neither shocked nor upset when you ask for the gift. Indeed, the individual may be wishing that you’d gotten around to the point 10 minutes earlier. So you ask. And you wait. And while you wait, your prospective donor is silently juggling the following questions.

- *Is this a priority for me? Is my interest in this group or this issue worth this much money?*
- *Do I have the money now or will I need to budget this gift over time?*
- *If I choose to make the gift now, do I have to transfer funds between accounts?*
- *How will this donation affect other financial obligations, including the other charities I support?*
- *Do I know of any unusual expenses (car repair, tuition payment, home improvement) coming up soon?*
- *Would I like my gift to be public, or would I prefer to be anonymous?*
- *Who else do I need to talk with to help me figure this out?*
- *How will I feel if I say yes? How will I feel if I say no?*

It’s a lot to think about, and it takes a while to work through all these questions. Rather than fill the space with your anxious chatter, sit quietly and give the prospect the gift of silence to figure it out.

If you feel the need to occupy yourself, sip your drink. And you don’t have to stare the person down; it’s fine to break eye contact and look away. If necessary, dig your fingernails into your kneecaps to distract yourself.

The main point is this: ask for the gift and wait with your mouth shut. Let the donor have their internal monologue. Very often what you will hear after that momentary pause is: “Yes, I will do that.”