



Moving from “Who Cares?” to “I Care!”—How to Win Support

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This article gives you eight pointers for achieving support for your causes and ways to help you generate the interest you need to do good work.

Winning support for important causes is not always easy. Most people do not, and will not, share the passion you have for your cause. However, you can often win their support anyway by thinking and acting strategically.

Here are some tips:

1. **Focus on the giver, not the recipient.** Customize your pitch to appeal to each group whose support you seek. Businesses want to grow their bottom line. Foundations want to fulfill their strategic plans. Media want newsworthy stories. Government officials want to win re-election. Pitch the angle that is most important to each to win support, even if that angle is not the most important to you.
2. **Forge strategic alliances.** Join forces with groups that have the marketing resources to spread the word about your cause. State what you bring to the table (your “worthiness” is not enough) when negotiating a relationship with another group: a not-for-profit bulk mailing permit, volunteers who will show up, discounted or free goods and services, media opportunities, access to a niche market. Stress how your group can help the other organization, not how the other organization can help your group or its constituents.
3. **Everybody is not a prospect.** You may be able to raise funds and gain publicity by producing athletic events, carnivals, street fairs, concerts, and other public events. Just remember that attendees are not likely to be your supporters and may not know or care about your cause. They came to race, ride the Ferris wheel, hear music, or win free prizes. Their participation, though, contributes resources to your organization that would not be available through donor-based or member-based activities.

4. **Don't always ask for money.** Many people have tired of incessant fund-raising solicitations. Use speaking engagements, public service announcements, expo booths, Web sites, and other venues to lure people in different ways. You can offer health, consumer, or other useful information; maintain a service hotline; post interesting facts about your issue to boost awareness; conduct contests or surveys; or link to relevant Web sites. You can ask for money later.
5. **Make it fun.** Hold parties instead of meetings and lectures. Schedule them in restaurants, clubs, amusement parks, or places where such events are not typically held. Decorate fundraisers with unusual props, such as life-size cutouts of celebrities. Start a meeting (yes, some meetings are necessary) with a short, funny quip or video. Ask attendees, when they introduce themselves, to share what book they are reading or what music they listened to most recently, not just their name and organizational affiliation. Spread candy bars and confetti along the center of meeting tables.
6. **Read the crowd.** Always speak to groups in a manner that is appropriate for that venue. The audience will not support you if it cannot relate to you. Be upbeat and fun-loving (and not too serious) in a party atmosphere, advocacy-oriented and strident in a political meeting, more solemn at a memorial service. Behave genuinely in all situations.
7. **Every little bit helps.** Allow people to do as little or as much as they like. You can ask them to contribute money, volunteer at an event, write to a legislator, sign a petition, wear a button, or just add their names to a supporters' list.
8. **Be realistic.** Growth is incremental. Don't let enthusiasm prevent you from acting wisely. Budget modest gains in fundraising and membership recruitment. A windfall is always better than a shortfall.

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