



What's driving your donors?

Larry F. Johnston, PhD

In seminars I teach at conferences, I'll frequently ask participants, "What is the primary purpose of development?"

Answers always vary, but they tend to cluster in several areas like *raising funds*, *building relationships*, *advancing the organization's mission*, and *teaching stewardship*.

There's truth in all of these, although I'm very doubtful about notions of teaching stewardship. That's a role of some excellent ministries, and certainly the role of churches, although most of the latter fail miserably on this front for a host of reasons.

If development has a role in stewardship, I think it has to do with providing attractive kingdom investment opportunities and then helping investors to feel, in the immortal words of Mae West, that "Too much of a good thing is marvelous!" That is, when it

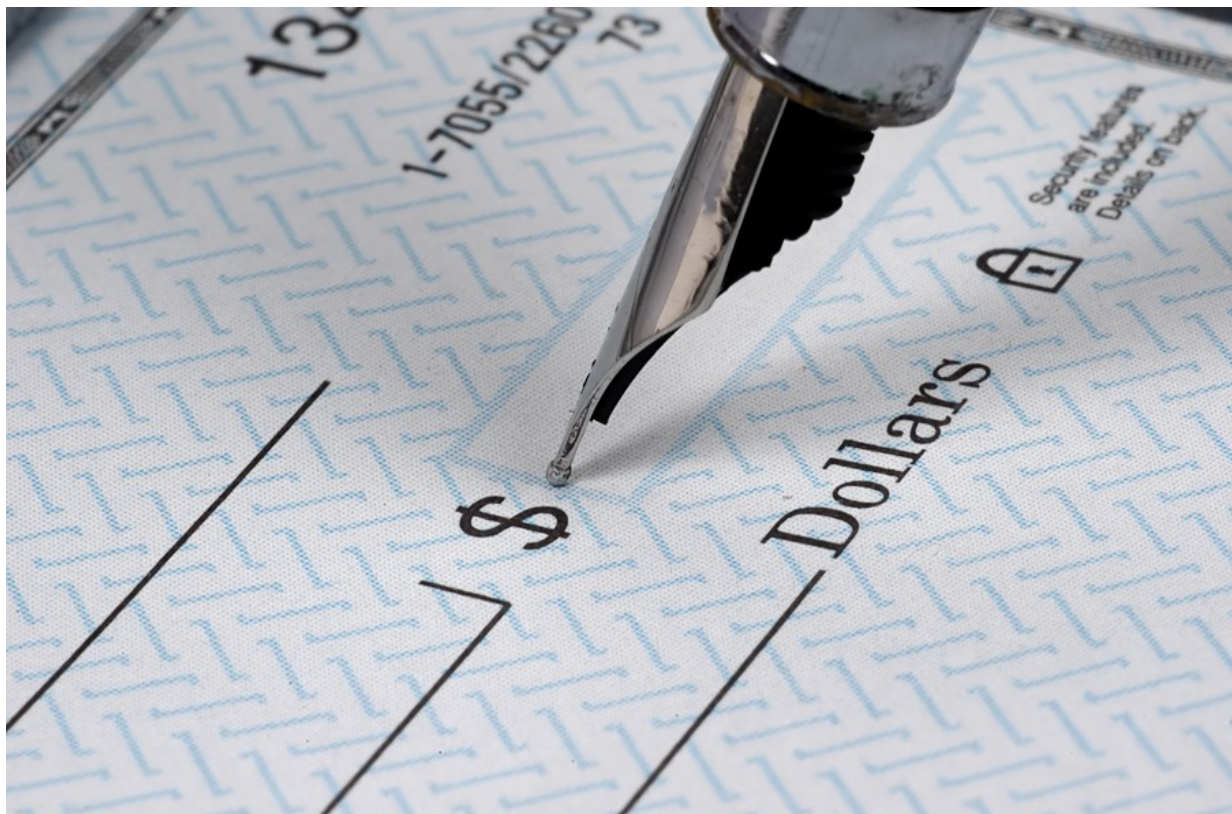
comes to making donors feel great about their giving, moderation is a vastly overrated virtue!

After hearing from the seminar audience, I'll tell them what the primary purpose of development is from my vantage point:

To create and keep the right kinds of donors.

Creating donors entails a host of activities, including branding, marketing and communications. And central in these activities is developing and articulating a *distinctive value proposition*, something that should be the cornerstone of your organization's strategy. A value proposition recognizes that increasingly, development departments must be about the business of *mutual value creation*: proactively creating value for donors and other stakeholders as they go about creating value (gift income, a healthy donor base, visibility, brand equity, etc.) for their organizations.

But *keeping* donors increasingly entails knowing what value *is* for your donors, and more specifically, what are the ***key value drivers*** for your donors.



Do you know what's driving your donors?

Our research has confirmed that there are a couple dozen drivers of donor satisfaction, engagement, loyalty, and thus donor lifetime value. We know that these drivers vary by organization and that while some of these clearly overlap, each donor base has a distinctive “personality.”

What’s more, our research confirms that key drivers not only vary *between* organizations, they can vary *within* organizations by donor segment. That is, key drivers for major donors can be different than those for medium and mass donors giving to the same organization. (*Major, medium, and mass* donors are typically fairly broad vertical segments of a donor “pyramid” reflecting amounts of financial support.)

Now here’s the head-scratcher:

It can be forcefully argued that nothing is more important to the success of development than consistently delivering on these key drivers, yet I doubt that one in 100 development departments could provide empirically (i.e., research) based answers to the critical question of what drives their donors’ loyalty.

----- § -----

**“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend
the first four sharpening the ax.”**

– Abraham Lincoln

----- § -----

Abraham Lincoln wisely noted that if he had six hours to chop down a tree, he’d spend four hours sharpening the ax. For those in development, sharpening the ax includes *knowing*, not merely guessing, what drives donor loyalty and lifetime value.

The truth be told, the key value drivers for your donors are in turn huge drivers of the success and even the sustainability of your organization.

Do you know what’s driving *your* donors?

If you feel your development engine might benefit from a tune-up, email me at drlarryjohnston@aol.com or call 303.638.1827 for a complimentary consultation.

Larry F. Johnston, PhD is president of McConkey • Johnston International, a firm twice awarded “Best General Fundraising Counsel in the Christian Sector” in independent national surveys of organizations using development consultants. www.mcconkey-johnston.com

For a pdf version of this article: <http://mji.wordsmith-marketing.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Whats-driving-your-donors.pdf>