



### **How Do We Say Thank You?**

I was at a seminar once with a person who introduced herself as the Director of Donor Care for a large charitable institution. Everyone in the room turned to look at her. Donor Care. Why had none of us ever thought of that one?

Even if it is unlikely that your title (or the title of anyone in your school) is ever going to be changed to the Director of Donor Care, surely it is possible for us to include Donor Care in each of our job descriptions.

How can we make our donors feel cared for? Feel like valued members of the community? *Feel the way you would like to feel when you choose to make a donation?*

The way we thank them is only a beginning but it *is* a beginning so let's start there.

### **When You Open the Envelope / Receive the Email Notification**

Is an immediate phone call appropriate? Yes, if the call is part of your "gratitude package." An email? Yes, if you know the person and the email is part of the gratitude package. (If you don't know them it might feel odd, or cold; or the donor might think this is all they are going to get from you.) A personal note? Yes, if it is part...you get it. Thinking of the process of offering thanks as the "Gratitude Package" is a step toward Donor Care; a step beyond the perfunctory thank you letter.

### **The Gratitude Package**

The package should not feel heavy-handed (overkill) but rather like you are taking the chance to express your real, heart-felt appreciation for the gift. A few lines in an email, a quick phone call or phone message, to say "I just opened this envelope and wanted to say you made my day, thank you!" A level of excitement is totally appropriate but don't overdo it. (I am reminded of a Vince Lombardi quote: "When you get to the end zone, act as if you've been there before.") If the donor seems put off by the phone call, cut it short but don't feel as if you have done the wrong thing. He or she might be the sort who would prefer keeping it low key so perhaps you don't call them again but you haven't done anything wrong.

A hand written note is particularly good in response to a gift at an event, especially when you know (and they should know) that the thank you letter will be following the note. (The note and the letter should not be redundant. Redundancy diminishes perceived sincerity.)

### **An Effective Thank You Letter from an Elementary School**

1. Expresses your appreciation for the investment.

2. Is warm and engaging, obviously written and signed by a human being,
3. Is not the same letter you send for every gift, every year.
4. Acknowledges the purpose for which the gift will be used.
5. References, if appropriate, the “continued investment” or the donor’s “shared belief in the value of our arts program” -- so that the donor knows that you know who they are and that they have given before.
6. Includes reference to the person(s) honored or memorialized by the gift.
7. Invites further engagement but does not ask for another gift.
8. Says something, some detail about what’s going on at the school.

### **Who Signs?**

If there is someone in your organization who has a relationship with the donor they should be considered as the signatory of the letter. (The letter is not the only way to reach out and thank donors, though. It may be appropriate for a Board member, or the principal or pastor, or the art teacher, etc. to be told of a gift so that, given the opportunity, they can also thank the donor.) If there is no one with this relationship, though, the development officer is an acceptable signatory. The development officer should be building a relationship with the donor on behalf of the school.

As to who writes the letter, generally it will be the development officer, who, we hope, has the skill to write a lovely, personal piece that expresses the gratitude of the institution *in the most expressive words*.

### **Tax Talk**

Most people do not give because they will receive a tax benefit for the gift but most people do expect the tax benefit and they should rightfully expect us to make claiming the benefit easy. The charitable organization is required by law to provide a document that acknowledges an individual gift of \$250 or more; many refer to this requirement as the tax letter. Please, it is a thank you letter -- all that is required is that it includes the IRS wording that indicates that no goods or services were received in exchange for the gift. This wording can be included at the bottom (under the PS) of every single tax letter that we send, whether the gift is more than \$250 or not.

Ideally, you also send a year-end gift summary for tax purposes. This summary is, guess what, another opportunity to thank your donors. If you are using a donor management system that magically cranks these statements out for you, be sure that you are still finding a way to include your gratitude.

### **That Extra Something**

I received a thank you letter from a University in North Carolina recently that came folded into a cardstock “holder.” The cardstock piece was full color, with a quote about the value of education. Two small slits in the holder held a bookmark which used the same photograph and quote as the holder.

Above the bookmark was a brief note from a member of the Class of 2015. The thank you letter was folded into this little case.

It was lovely. And totally raised the bar for me in terms of what I would love to see in a thank you. It was colorful, it made the piece into a package on its own. I felt thanked.

Now, the real test will be when I make another gift to this school, will they send me the same folder or a new one? I really, really hope it will be new.

Lynn Fredrick  
Advancement Consultant  
Office of Catholic Schools  
[lfredrick@archchicago.org](mailto:lfredrick@archchicago.org)

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