



## There's a Hole in Your Bucket

We are trying to build advancement programs, right? Trying to fill the revenue bucket of our budgets with new, growing financial support every year. This requires thinking of that bucket in a new way, and helping your community see it in a new way.

What are the things (the programs, the events, the initiatives) that fill the bucket most effectively? Before we answer that question, here is another: what are the things you are doing now to try to fill that bucket?

Every little "fundraiser" that you do is a little hole in that bucket. Every little fundraiser allows money (and your time, your energy) to drain away, diminishing the work that you should be doing to build your advancement program. It drains the time and energy of your volunteers; it drains half the money that the program brings in but most importantly it drains the potential for real giving in your community.

In addition to all these small, labor intensive efforts, many of our schools expect "mandatory fundraising commitments" of their school parents. We call the programs that make up this commitment *fundraising programs* but they are not fundraising at all – not even fundraising of the worst kind. They are another form of currency that we accept for tuition payments. (*"You can pay the \$4,500 of your tuition via cash, credit card, ADC, or check but the \$500 balance must be paid by participating in Manna, or Market Day, or raffle tickets, or Calendar Club..."*) And we have trained them to think of this as fundraising. *"No, I shouldn't be expected to go to the auction, or give to the annual fund; I already bought all my raffle tickets."*

When your school asks for this commitment and calls it fundraising, and when the all the fundraising effort for the school consists of a series of small events and programs, you are training people to believe that when they buy gift wrap, or taffy apples, or popcorn they are making a gift to your school. That isn't what they are doing. What they are really doing is either paying a bill or making a purchase. In either case, this is a transaction, not a gift.

A fundraising program based on transactions is easy because it doesn't depend on the buyer's relationship with the organization. You still buy cookies when you don't know the Girl Scout, right? You buy poinsettias from the teens on the block without even being sure what project they are trying to fund. You buy a raffle ticket because you might win something.

Transactional fundraising is easy because the seller doesn't have to prove anything. The gift wrap shows up at school and you deliver it to the person who bought it. You don't have to convince the buyer of the value of your school – just the value or the attractiveness of the gift wrap.

Transactional fundraising is easy because it is what we've taught our constituents to expect. We don't have to explain it to them! Nothing to understand about shopping.

What would happen if we asked our constituents to invest in something rather than to buy something? We would fill the bucket with philanthropic giving.

The conversion process is not easy. It's not easy because philanthropic giving is everything that transaction giving is not: it is dependent on relationship; it requires evidence of a program worthy of investment; it requires communication. It requires strong leadership, strong, clear messaging and a real education campaign. It requires the change of heart of those who have been invested in the transaction world. It requires a leap of faith, a sense of humor and a good deal of patience.

But the conversion process is also a great opportunity. You and your colleagues have to take a good, clear-headed look at what you profess to be and what you are inviting donors to build with you. It is an opportunity for a great revamp of your mission communication. It requires that you *tell your story*.

Who are the leaders who are required to be strong – and on board with this change? The principal, the main person who controls the culture of the school. The Board, presumably the leaders of vision for the school. The pastor, the main person who controls the culture of the parish – and the guy who will take the complaints of those opposed to change. Finally, the people whose programs will change: the gift wrap sellers, the popcorn sellers, etc.

What is the strong and clear message that is required? This is who we are and this is what we believe in. This is why you should invest in us and this is what we will do with your investment. This is how your gift will change you and this is how your gift will help us change the world.

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

*July 2014*