

How to Enliven Your Planned Giving Advisory Council

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Have you ever thought about coming to the meetings of your professional advisors group from a different direction? In my experience, most Planned Giving Advisory Council (PGAC) meetings are focused on the organization's planned giving program and contain reports of marketing efforts as well as discussions about current or recent gifts. Why not ask the advisors to share their stories about how they advanced your organization's cause with their clients?

That's what I did for my last meeting when I asked three well-known and helpful professionals to tell stories from their professional practices.

Why You Should Ask THEM to Speak

It's easy to get legal or financial professionals to give you all the reasons they can't discuss charitable gifts to your organization with their clients. Yet historically many large gifts have been made through legal and financial professionals.

Wouldn't it be great to build a forum in which their peers explain how these professionals can encourage planned gifts from their clients? This type of interaction builds positive recognition for the professionals who have been helpful to your organization, and encourages this kind of behavior among others. Who doesn't enjoy positive recognition from like-minded professionals? In addition, the more reluctant professionals consider give more weight to what their successful peers say than similar statements from a person whose main job is to raise funds for his/her organization.

It is an often difficult but important task to convince professional naysayers that the ethical and practical considerations that govern their practice are not roadblocks

against opening charitable conversations. To accomplish this, you might want to tell reluctant professionals how others have successfully served their clients by helping them make substantial gifts; better yet, let those professionals speak for themselves.

How It Worked

I accomplished this peer-to-peer dynamic by asking an attorney, a broker and a physician to share their personal experiences of discussing charitable giving with their clients and to address the practical considerations raised by their client/professional relationships and their professional codes of ethics.

I was initially pleasantly surprised by how easy it was to enlist the support of the professionals I approached. I had made a list of the professionals who had been involved in specific planned gifts to the hospital over the years. Then I selected those PGAC members who had helped their clients make the largest planned gifts as my presenters. When I called them, they each agreed immediately. Where I had expected a bit of hesitation about speaking to their peers on this unusual topic, I found them anxious to share their knowledge and experiences. I also wanted to have the members of my PGAC hear from a physician because I have found that they love any interaction with physicians and listen to them with special interest. Fortunately, I have an excellent relationship with the physician whose patient had made the largest completed planned gift to our hospital to that date. He was also caring for a woman who is over 100 years old who has named the hospital for a significant gift in her estate plan. The physician was also gladly agreed to speak in this setting.

I am on the advisory board of the Newtown Community Foundation which has just formed in our community, and our Vice President for Medical Affairs is a member

of both its board and my PGAC. I asked him to invite board members to our PGAC meeting, and four of the eight - 50% - attended.

To prep the three speakers I gave them copies of the lead article in the April issue of *Planned Giving Today*, “Talking to Advisors About Talking to Donors” by Kathryn Miree. I handed a copy of this article to everyone at the meeting and copies of some slides from, “Is Philanthropy Any of an Advisor’s Business?” by H. King McGlaughon, which he had presented at an event for the local APF chapter. I quickly reviewed several slides that showed that the richest Americans give the most to charities and that ultra high net worth individuals report that they would like to have more advice about charitable giving options from their legal and financial advisors.

The *Planned Giving Today* article started the presenters’ creative juices and framed the beginning of the discussion. The attorney reported that he read the “Rules of Proper Conduct” of his Bar Association and called the state Bar Association’s Ethics Hotline. Not surprisingly, he reported that there wasn’t much discussion about charitable giving in either place. He also highlighted the estimated \$41 trillion wealth transfer, compared it to the \$2.7 billion Federal budget, and spoke convincingly about the good that could be done in our society if a significant percentage of that wealth transfer went to charity.

The broker next told about a specific case of a wealthy individual with whom he had a 15-year relationship. His client was giving 100% of his income to charity and had no heirs. Like many of this broker’s other very wealthy clients, this one had no relationship with an estate planning attorney. Fortunately the broker was able to introduce this client to a lawyer who set up a CRT and drafted a will which named

several charities, including our hospital. A few years later, circumstances arose that would have put this individual's entire estate at jeopardy if this planning had not occurred. Our charity is named as a beneficiary of the CRT and is expected to receive approximately \$1,500,000 through the donor's will.

Then the physician addressed the advising professionals on an entirely different level. He spoke about the positive experience that so many of his patients have here at our hospital, specifically the feeling that they have been touched in a compassionate way by our staff, especially the nurses. He told of a number of older patients who have told him, "I love St. Mary." Then he said, "At that point, I turn them over to Scott." This comic relief led to an open discussion in which most of the professionals participated.

As opposed to the negative arguments about why professionals cannot discuss charitable gifts with their clients, participants pointed out that these discussions actually produce better financial and estate plans. A number of extremely positive comments were made about the value the hospital brings to the community. Advisors spoke of the quality of our leadership and the soundness of the board's investment policies. The best comment came from an attorney who is about to join the board. He told the group, "You have to be a donor yourself to have credibility." Then he made a personal appeal for all members of the PGAC to join the St. Mary Legacy Society, and he ended saying, "Even a small percentage of your final assets can make a significant gift."

These comments made by the advisors to their peers carried a great deal of authority and credibility. Many of those same comments would have sounded banal coming from me. The dynamic of holding up the successes of two well-known advisors and a physician encouraged the others to see themselves in similar situations and to think

and speak positively about the personal interactions that often lead to significant charitable gifts.

Three Big Surprises

This was the fourth meeting of our PGAC. While we were talking after the meeting, one member told me that after our first meeting he had wondered if this group could be sustained and expected the interest to die out. However, this meeting seemed to him to have reached a new high, and he could only imagine it getting better. In addition to this and other pieces of positive feedback, I was especially pleased by three surprises that came out of this meeting:

- The attendance and engagement of the members far surpassed anything I had seen at previous meetings. The PGAC has been in existence for only two years. I started small and built to a current membership of 18; we had 21 members and guests at this meeting. I also started receiving calls from other professionals who are interested in joining.
- The Newtown Community Foundation was scheduled to make a presentation at the Bucks County (PA) Estate Planning Council three weeks after our PGAC meeting. The board asked me to make a significant portion of that presentation based on the PowerPoint® presentation I had shared.
- The biggest surprise came early in the process when one of the three presenters called me back to discuss his part. As we were ending our conversation he asked, “What do we need to do to complete that gift we’ve been talking about for the past several months before the meeting?” He had never previously stated a clear intention to make that gift. Two weeks before the meeting, he named the hospital

as the irrevocable beneficiary of a CRT that he funded with over \$1,000,000.

This trust was not funded by one of his clients, but with his personal assets.

Conclusion

As gift planners we make numerous attempts to bring legal and financial professionals onto our team. Don't overlook opportunities to allow your team members to tell their own stories. They bring more credibility and a higher interest level from their peers than we are able to produce without their assistance and leadership. They are often the gatekeepers into the wealth in our communities, they often possess considerable personal wealth, and they may be excellent candidates for making planned gifts with their private assets. Focusing on their success stories at a meeting of your PGAC could lead other professionals to follow their example.

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