



Tracks to Success - A Weekly Primer on Grants Development

Re-Igniting the Passion for Your Mission

by Terry Axelrod, CEO Raising More Money

Part Two - You Never Know Who Will Be Generous

Instead of assuming you can predict which people are likely to become major donors, treat everyone who comes in contact with your organization as a potential major donor. The demographics have shifted so significantly, you just can't assume anything anymore. Today's major donors come in all shapes and sizes.

Ruth Tupper, 84, of Bossier City, LA, for example, seems an unlikely donor. She never earned more than \$20,000 a year in her long career as a bookkeeper. To supplement her small income from Social Security and an annuity, she resells errant golf balls that fall into her yard. She also collects aluminum cans for sale to the local recycling plant.

But Tupper knows how to save. She bought her home for \$5,000 forty years ago. With no dependents, she put half of every paycheck and all of a small inheritance into CDs and government bonds.

One of her biggest joys is nature--tending her organic garden and enjoying the birds of the season. While reading National Geographic, she came across a story on the Nature Conservancy. She was so inspired she has donated nearly \$300,000.

Tupper's story was in the Spring 2005 issue of Imagine, a beautiful four-color magazine on philanthropy in Louisiana.

Connie Phillips, the executive director of [Sojourner Center](#), a domestic violence shelter in Phoenix, AZ, said if anyone told her a few years ago that they would be getting million-dollar donations from seemingly "regular" people, she would never have believed it.

"We're not the symphony or the ballet," she said.

A million-dollar donor came to Sojourner originally looking to give away \$10,000 for tax purposes. He said the other nonprofits he called hadn't been very responsive. But Sojourner Center welcomed his involvement and cultivated him as if he could be a long-term supporter of their mission. They had no idea he could afford to give away a million dollars.

As Phillips tells it, she and the donor were at a low-budget salad bar for lunch when the donor made the offer. She said after she nearly fell off her chair, they both teared up.

"It was a holy moment," she said.

Phillips said the donor thanked her for allowing him to do something so worthwhile with his money.

Some of the hospitals we work with say it's usually not the wealthy doctors who give the most or who make longer-term commitments. Often major donors are simply the people who were once helped by the nonprofit or who have loved ones the organization helped.

There are many people out there who simply need to feel a connection to an organization in order to become million-dollar donors.

One expert who makes this point is someone who works with high-end donors. H. Peter Karoff, founder of the Philanthropic Initiative, a group in Boston that provides advice to donors, told the Chronicle of Philanthropy in February, "There remains a tremendous amount of money in the woodwork that could be philanthropic."

He said one reason this money hasn't been donated is that donors aren't convinced they can make a difference. When nonprofits learn how to show the impact of their work and connect donors with their mission, they will be surprised by the people who want to make major gifts.

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This is the second in a six-part series on "Re-Igniting the Passion for Your Mission" by Terry Axelrod, founder and CEO of Raising More Money Inc., a Seattle-based organization that has trained and coached more than 2,000 nonprofits in a system for building sustainable funding from individual donors. [Click here](#) for more information.