



FUNDRAISING IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Fundraising is not “taking from the rich to give to the poor.” It’s not walking in off the street asking for a donation. If the idea of asking for money makes you break into a cold sweat, then maybe you need another way to approach it.

Step back for a moment. Let’s pretend you just baked a big batch of cookies and you want to share them with a neighbor. Who do you pick?

- The neighbor you don’t really know — they’ve lived there a while, but you never really cross paths with them.
- The neighbor who is so busy all the time, they barely even wave at you.
- The neighbor who came over last week and helped you get your mower started.

That might seem obvious, but the real question is how is your American Legion Auxiliary unit or post home perceived by your community? Does the community at large know who you are and what you do? Do they see your post as more than a bar? Do you make time to reach out and assist local community leaders? Do you make sure the community sees the good work you do?

People want to help those who are in need. But no matter how “rich” they are, they can’t help everyone. They must, and will, be selective. If you want to be first in line to receive the batch of cookies, your neighbors need to know who you are, what you do, and why you matter!

Let’s look at another scenario:

Your neighbor asks you to pick up their newspaper when they are on vacation. Of course you are going to do that. Later, you need help moving a couch before the carpet cleaners come. Is it easier or harder to ask your neighbor for help now that you have helped them? Are they more or less likely to happily come over to help you?

In this scenario, you have developed a relationship with your neighbor. You now automatically help each other when you can. When you need help, you ask. They can’t always be there, they don’t always have the resources, but it’s no big deal to ask.

Start thinking about how you can engage your unit/post community and neighbors. Be ready to reach out when an opportunity presents itself. You need to engage them.

There are several easy ways you can reach out in your community:

- A local business is having a Veterans Day sale. Ask if they would like a POW/MIA table set up during their event. Same for Memorial Day: Ask about displaying poppies. Make sure the display includes your unit/post name.
- Provide poppies to the mayor when you hear that he/she is attending a school assembly or other public event.
- Offer free membership to government leaders who qualify.
- Ask for a proclamation to be read at a City Council meeting. Have your members attend wearing branded clothing.
- Establish a newsletter and make sure you include community leaders and local media in the distribution.
- Follow, like, share, and comment on social media pages of local businesses and leaders.

Always show appreciation for those who help. Post on your social media pages, notify local media, inform the mayor's office, and send a thank-you. It doesn't matter if their contribution was big or small; you never know where the next contribution will come from.

Of course, none of this happens overnight. It takes deliberate and consistent effort.

These actions have paid off for American Legion Auxiliary Unit 62 in Peoria, Ariz. In the past five years, they have raised over \$60,000 from outside sources.

— *By Marge Christianson, American Legion Auxiliary Arizona member*