

The Most Powerful Impact on a Giver's Money: Just Ask

Right now, many pastors are asking how to increase giving this year. They have set their annual budgets, have planned for staff and expenses, and are anxiously watching the stock market and political news.

I have seen many strategies to increase giving in churches, and the most common has 'hope and prayer' as a central tenet. While I am a fan of hope and I think prayer is essential, there are also things we can do as leaders to increase revenue. I believe the two most powerful methods are to tell stories about the impact a giver's money will or has had, and to simply ask.

Why Not?

When I talk with church leaders, there is a lot of resistance to discussing money with the congregation. There appear to be two primary reasons. First, they feel awkward or guilty about asking people for money that goes directly into their pocket. That seems selfish and greedy. Second, they don't have good tools or language to talk about giving in a productive way.

I have worked in some version of sales for many years now and I know every sale impacts my pocket. Maybe I get a commission, or maybe I just promote my company, but even that makes my employment more stable. As a result of that, I have learned to be comfortable asking people to buy stuff I sell, as long as I believe it is in their best interest.

So let's talk about how to ask for money. What are the steps?

Create an Invitation

Any time you are asking people to give, I recommend you follow this six-step process to create a well-formed invitation. Invitation is different than cajoling or begging because an invitation honors the human dignity in both you (the asker) and them (the giver). Without preserving human dignity and their right to choose, guilt and frustration sets in on both sides of the conversation.

- **State what you want.** Creating an informed choice is critical to an invitation, and that starts with them being well informed. I recommend very direct language here. *"I would like to see each and every one of you tithe 10% of your income to this church for a year."*
- **Describe the benefit to you.** Do you feel that personal guilt rise up in your gut? In this area, you should focus on the benefit to the church, but don't neglect that you are a beneficiary. Transparency is key to eliminating the gossip and inferences created by an unclear message. *"If you decide to do this, our church ministry could grow tenfold. We can increase the salary and health benefits of our staff, which I know I would enjoy, and we can finally fix that air conditioner. Imagine the homeless outreach opportunities!"* (This is also where you can share those stories we mentioned earlier.)
- **Show the benefit to them.** Do they really get a benefit from giving their hard-earned

money to you? I believe they do. I have found that regular giving is a form of discipleship and faith that has yielded great benefits in my life and my marriage. Think deeply about your own theology and attitude here. *“I think the benefit to you is a sense of satisfaction that you are moving the kingdom of God forward. In addition, I believe following God’s commands reaps great rewards in your life.”*

- **Explicitly give them the right to decline.** It is very tempting to leave this part out. They already know they can decline to give, right? They must know that, they aren’t giving now! Something very powerful happens when you explicitly say it out loud (and mean it). You have handed all the power in the conversation over to them, increasing your credibility and honoring their personal dignity and decision-making skills. If you are nervous or hesitant about this step, do it twice. *“Of course, this is your decision and I understand if you choose not to give. And that is OK. Please know God still loves you and you are still welcome here.”*
- **Describe the consequences if they decline.** The second part of making an informed choice is knowing what will happen if I decline. Since you just told me declining was fine to do, it is only fair that you share what will be the natural consequence of that decision. *“We operate this church on your tithes and offerings. Without them, we would have to reduce our facilities maintenance and our staff.”*
- **Inquire and wait.** Make the ask. Close the deal. Make the sale. Once you have presented the other elements, and made your case, then clearly put the monkey on their back. Once you have done this, stop talking. No really, let the silence invade. It is not a pressure tactic; it is giving them space to process their own thoughts. In the moment that might be 10 to 15 seconds of dead air. In church calendars, it might take people weeks to decide. *“Would you be willing to commit to this? Please let us know.”*

Other than the last one — the waiting part — the order of these steps or elements is not important. I recommend starting with this order as it is easy to remember and create in your script. However, once you master the structure, feel free to change it up a bit.

A note on execution here: prepare. Take the time to think through each element and be confident in each statement. If you are feeling a bit wishy-washy on any part of this, it will come through in your communication and reduce your effectiveness. This can expose some personal views and attitudes that might be holding you back and need attention.

Your Next Move

Consider what is holding you back from being more deliberate when you ask for giving. If it is a personal hang-up, get some help from friends who are good at it. Start with your favorite salesman, then find a successful pastor and ask them to help you craft this invitation and work through the resistance.

If your challenge is the language and structure, go try out a well-formed invitation. Maybe with a congregant on the fence, or in a video announcement. Work your way up to sharing on stage and see how it goes.