

GIFT PLANNING IN A PANDEMIC

Rush Hour on the Planned Giving Freeway

There's a new word in the legacy giving marketplace – and it's a word we've never used before when referring to the process of gift planning.

That word is URGENCY.

That's right, URGENCY.

The Old Word Was 'Patience'.

Fundraisers of almost all stripes are taught to use urgency as a motivator to give. Direct response fundraising, in particular, loves to use phrases like 'give now' or 'donate today' to compel an immediate response.

Gift planners, on the other hand, have always had to work a different magic. The brain research of Dr. Russell James has taught us to tap into the autobiographical brain. Which, when translated into best practice, has been to be unhurried, to go at the prospect's pace and to let gifts bloom over time.

Think of it from the fundraiser's point of view: We have always counseled our clients to see legacy gift marketing as an old-fashioned courtship. Take gradual, patient steps. Don't rush. Suggest, don't push. Keep sending donors repeated legacy messages over time (and by that, we mean years) like gentle raindrops on a roof. And, before this pandemic shook our world, this was all very good (donor-centered!) advice.

Think of it from the legacy donor's point of view: We have always encouraged our clients to accept that donors can take 3-5 years from the moment they first think of making a planned gift

to the moment they decide they're going to do it. And then, they can take another 3-5 years from the moment they mentally commit to the moment they either sign or update their will. Smart charities – before COVID-19 that is – saw planned giving fundraising as a very long-term process.

A World Turned Upside Down

To go back to the rush hour metaphor, most of us have always seen our planned giving programs as a steady journey along a slow-moving factory conveyor belt. We pace and plan both our moves and messages in an unobtrusive and subtle manner so as to dance around a subject as sensitive as death.

Well, the tide has turned – and your donors have turned it. A lot of Canadians (and a lot of people worldwide) are now in a hurry to get their affairs in order. They're facing their own mortality and death head-on.

Why the Rush?

As many of us already know, death is a subject that the brain likes to avoid. We all know all sorts of people – especially those under 65 – who have wonderful intentions of making wills and charitable bequests. But, they take their sweet time getting around to it.

This pandemic has put our mortality in our faces in a way that most of us have never experienced before. Many of us are actually afraid we could die from



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COVID-19, and we want to make sure that our loved ones are provided for should we not be around much longer.

So what has actually changed?

Canadians are rushing to their lawyers to make and/or update an existing will.

Will Making in the time of COVID-19

My fellow Good Workers and I heard about this will-making rush from clients, colleagues, allied professionals and then news outlets, in the early weeks of the pandemic in both Canada and the U.S.

In a straw poll-type survey of lawyers conducted by Good Works – and thanks to the invaluable help of our friends at the Canadian Association of Gift Planners – we found that:

- Almost 70% of Canadian lawyer respondents report that they're getting a lot more or somewhat more estate planning business since the pandemic struck. And when asked about the motivator for this increase, only a quarter of respondents felt that more than 50% of this activity was significantly driven by the Coronavirus pandemic (remember, most will-making happens because of changes to wealth, health or family status).
- The estate planning traffic includes those making new wills (41%), those who are updating an existing will (35%) and those signing off on a will they had started drafting before COVID-19.
- Only a small portion (less than 25%)

of those making new wills and those updating existing wills are including charitable bequests in their estate plans.

- When it comes to updating wills, Coronavirus has had a minor impact on the age of folks engaged in estate planning. Whereas before the pandemic, will-updates were predominantly undertaken by individuals 61+ years of age, during the last month, it's been slightly more folks in the 30-45 (3%) and 46-60 (7%) age groups.
- Of those folks making a new will, 65% of the activity is being undertaken by individuals under 60 years of age. While Civics and Baby Boomers have always been the prime market for charitable bequest marketing, we now have primed audiences in the Gen X – and even older Millennial – cohorts. These folks are now most active.

Perhaps more importantly than the survey results themselves, we were struck by how many lawyers declined to participate because they were too swamped with the

increase in estate planning traffic!

Also of note, the Irish My Legacy Campaign initiative reports that three-quarters of lawyers are experiencing increased estate planning traffic – and the average increase is almost 30%. Added to that, Irish lawyers report that 86% of those who make inquiries are following through and completing their wills.

What Does a Smart Fundraiser Do in This New Pandemic World?

Many fundraisers we've talked to have the strong intuitive feeling that now is not the time to talk about death with our donors. We believe the opposite.

We talked about this in our April 2020 fireside chat "What Now? Planned Giving During the Pandemic of our Lifetimes" with Ryan Fraser a financial advisor with Quiet Legacy Planning Group and Brenda McEachern a lawyer from RBC Wealth Management Financial Services. You can also find a fantastic summary of this

webinar penned by my colleague Fraser Green on the Good Works blog.

Your donors have made it necessary for you to keep up – or even ramp up – your legacy communications and marketing efforts. A large number of your supporters are making their wills now.

Donors on average, make three wills in the course of their lifetime. You cannot afford to cut your planned giving activities now. You snooze, you lose.

Having said that, it's critical that your gift planning messages not sound desperate, rushed, organizationally-focussed or panic-driven. Your voice and stories must be thoughtful, appropriate and sensitive to the feelings that we're all having during this pandemic.

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