



20 Top Corporate Fundraising Tips for Fundraisers

I want to share with fundraisers worldwide a short list of subjective tips on corporate fundraising, which is based on my 11 years spent at Levi Strauss working as a corporate donor. This list is very much what I covered during my recent workshop titled - 'Put Yourself in Their Shoes' at the 9th IWRM held in Bangalore, India this June, and is based upon the questions participants raised throughout the event.

I hope this proves useful for fundraisers involved with Corporate Fundraising worldwide.

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1. First of all, **think twice before getting into corporate fundraising**. Why? Because it can be hard work with questionable results. Bear in mind: globally corporate support represents only around 4% of the total income of charities. And companies on average give away only 1% of their precious profit. Still interested? Keep reading.
2. **Know yourself**. No, it's not philosophy. It's very practical advice about knowing your organisation's values, work, impact, and limits. Knowing means valuing and believing. You will not convince companies to work with you unless you fully believe you bring value to the table. And you do, believe me.
3. **Know the company**. But know them well. Put yourself in their shoes (or trousers ☺) What are their products, markets, and brands? Who are their consumers and what are their concerns? Who are their employees, senior managers, owners and competitors? Where are they located and what are their concerns? What is the Corporate Responsibility inspiration and track record of the company? What are their weaknesses in this field? What do they have to give to the community – apart from cash? Would you buy their products?
4. **Think beyond cash**. Companies don't like giving away cash. Especially nowadays. Don't forget they have been created to make cash. However, they have lots of other resources and sometimes you and they don't think about using them in the partnership. Why not? Products, services, employees' time and expertise, office space, used machines, business networks, popular brands, access to consumers and employees, dreams of CEOs to change the world. I'm sure you can continue the list. Take your list with you when meeting with companies.
5. **Focus on common values**, instead of looking at what divides the company and your organisation. Ask the question: How can we create partnership to use resources of the company and our organisation to achieve common goals?



6. **Find the right person at the company** and transform him/her into your advocate, story teller and warrior within the company. It can be the CSR Manager, the head of the company's foundation, a marketing manager, a PR person, the CEO's assistant or the CEO him/herself. Doesn't matter unless they shape and make the decision you are interested in. Meet them face-to-face and help them sell your cause to others at the company, including, of course, the Finance Manager ☺
7. **Dare to be different** when competing with other NGOs to grab the attention of companies. I have received thousands of grant requests in my life, but I still remember the ones that were different in some way. Either with the idea or the language or the project presentation. Or simply because they used humor or nicely surprised me.
8. **Tell your story combining hard facts with emotions.** Facts and figures are critical, but sometimes people from nonprofits become too business-like when meeting with companies. Don't fall into this trap. Be emotional. Be human. They are, too. And they will respond. However, don't try to shock them with painting all the miseries of the world on their wall. Then they will simply stop listening.
9. Most people at businesses love making decisions and taking actions. Use this capacity of them. **Involve them in decision making and give them things to do.** They will love it. Given that it doesn't require too much time.
10. **Always bring partnership options to the table.** Be flexible when discussing the project to fund, be open for their advice, but **negotiate hard** and know your interests and limits when contracting.
11. **Be specific when you're asked what you want.** Never say you would be happy with anything they can give.
12. **Listen to your heart when it comes to ethical questions.** Would you be proud of telling about your corporate partnership to your friends, Mom or children? If not, don't get into it.
13. **Be honest and transparent with your corporate partners.** Under-promise and over-deliver. Tell them if you experience difficulties with the project and propose to renegotiate. Invite them to your office for a coffee with the staff. Hopefully, they will treat you in the same way.
14. **Communicate, communicate, and communicate.** First of all, with your contact person. S/he has to be updated and regularly fed with information and visual materials on the supported program. Secondly, with your staff and your clients. Thirdly, with the media. Use the company's resources to spread the word and create media buzz.
15. **Have a good website** which is regularly updated and provides the right amount of information. I don't mean a fancy site. Just a clear, working one.



16. **Give a K.I.S.S.** to each communication with your corporate partner. **Keep It Short and Simple.** Test it with a friend who has no clue about what your organisation does (it could also be a board member 😊) If your friend understands your grant report, everybody will.
17. **Be patient** and build your partnership step by step. But don't devote more energy and resources to this area than income from it deserves.
18. Never forget that you are there to **serve your community.** Be their voice throughout the process. Your organisation doesn't really matter until your clients are well-served. That's what matters to your partner company, too.
19. **Not convinced? Create your own company** to make enough money to achieve your social goals. In this case, you no longer need to bother about corporate fundraising 😊
20. And by the way: **enjoy and have fun.** I always do.