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Fund-Raising as a Persuasive Act

ROBERT C. JEFFREY

When I became Dean of the College of Communication at the University of Texas at Austin in 1979, I was naive about the fund-raising role of that position. It did not take long for the Provost to make clear that the Dean was the central figure in raising private money for the College. I had no prior experience as a fundraiser, so had to learn through trial and error.

What I propose to do in this brief paper is to set out the several steps I used in my fund-raising efforts, a strategy firmly fixed in the Aristotelian principles all of us in communication hold dear. Then I will describe two successful fund-raising campaigns I conducted, one for a large gift and one for a relatively small gift.

Even though the College needed some attention given to other matters resulting from rapid growth, I ventured into the fund-raising effort in the first month in office. Because the development office at the University was not helpful to new Deans at that time, I was left to my own designs. The first thing I did was to adopt Aristotle as my guide. In good Aristotelian manner, my first step was to build the credibility of the College. I invited nationally known people in the communication industry to join the Advisory Council of the College for the purpose of using their names as supporters of the College when I approached potential donors. It was a two-year process, but it paid off in the long run.

While I was building the quality of the Advisory Council, I began step two in the process of designing a fund-raising program for the College. That step was to assess the needs of the College that could be solved, or partially solved, with gift money. With the help of an assistant dean in the office, I developed the following list of needs:

Faculty Development Programs	\$3,000,000
Student Scholarships and Fellowships	\$3,350,000
Endowed Chairs and Professorships	\$4,000,000
Equipment and Other Teaching Aids	\$2,000,000
Public Conferences and Research	\$2,500,000
College Placement Bureau	\$1,000,000
Total Endowment Needs	\$15,850,000

So the second step in fund-raising is assessment of needs in real dollar terms.

After determining the gross needs of the College, the next step, in good Aristotelian methodology, was to define the audience. We began to identify a list of wealthy individual alumni who might be in positions to contribute significant funds to the department or

college. Alumni associations can be extremely useful in this step. Experience reveals that the largest gifts to academic institutions come from individuals.

However, don't stop there. Analyze all of the foundations and corporations in the state that have a history of giving to educational institutions or projects. Some may even have given specifically to communication projects. Determine how many gifts they give each year, the average size gift, and the largest annual gift they have ever awarded. Almost every state publishes a directory of foundations and corporations from which this kind of information can be found.

Step four is designing the message. We began by matching the individuals, foundations, and corporations with the general financial needs of the department or college as defined in our second step. Then we determined which of the donors might be more likely to contribute to what category of need and what kinds of persuasive messages we could muster to justify the selections.

A second act in designing the message is arriving at the appropriate amount of money to request as a gift. We do not want to ask too little of a potential donor and risk leaving money on the table, nor do we want to ask for so much that it frightens the donor. Arriving at the amount to request takes some skill, some intuition, and some boldness.

The final act in developing the message is to put all of the information into a narrative form to present to the potential donor. Donors want to be asked for something specific. They do not want to give to some "general fund," the purpose of which is unspecified. So, to be persuasive, the request letter should be brief and include the following: 1) the amount requested; 2) the purpose for which the funds will be used; 3) how the gift will benefit the donor; 4) how the gift will benefit the department, college, students; 5) and any special pay-out provisions, such as one fourth of the total amount of the pledge each year for four years rather than the full amount up front (often very attractive, especially for large gifts).

Step five, selecting the person to make the presentation to the potential donor is most important, especially when asking for large gifts. It is another aspect of the Aristotelian principle of ethos or source credibility and it amounts to reinforcing the credibility you began to establish in step one. Donors are not likely to give large sums of money to someone or institution unless they know and trust the one asking. Of course, the fact that you represent an institution of higher education provides a great deal of credibility, but you need more than that.

Often, you as an individual will have no personal contact with the potential donor (target). If you do not have a close relationship with that person or entity, it is wise to locate someone who is close to the target and for whom the target has acknowledged respect and who might be willing to represent you with the potential donor. For example, someone close to the department or college might be serving on the Board of Directors of a foundation you wish to approach for a gift. That person may be an alumnus or just a friend, but it should be someone in whom the potential donor has trust. I have used this approach in probably 90% of my "asks."

The sixth step is to make the "ask." This is the most difficult aspect of fund-raising for most novices. It is made less difficult, however, if you remember three things. First, executives of foundations and corporations are accustomed to being asked for contributions, so you will not be the first person who has asked for a monetary gift. I learned this early in my fund-raising experiences. One of my first visits was to an executive with the *Los Angeles Times*. He was an alumnus of the College, and as soon as I took a seat on his office couch, he said, "O.K. Bob how much do you want and what's it for?" On another occasion, an executive simply and respectfully said, "I only have fifteen minutes, Bob, so let me know what you want and what good it will do [my company]." This suggests several other things to remember when making the ask: business executives are busy people and, in most cases, do not want to spend time with small talk; they want to know what benefit

they get from the gift; and they expect you to be prepared. Have all of the information well in mind and be confident in your presentation.

Once you have made the ask, your fund-raising task is completed. So the six steps in preparing to raise gift money are:

1) establish credibility; 2) assess the needs of the department or college in dollar terms; 3) determine and define your audience (potential donors); 4) design the message; 5) select the person or persons with the credibility to successfully make your pitch; and 6) make the ask. The two examples of fund-raising proposals detailed below will help explain more vividly how the steps work to bring success. The first example is a request for what I would call a mega-bucks gift. The second is for a much smaller gift.

EXAMPLE ONE: A REQUEST FOR A 5-MILLION DOLLAR GIFT

In the first month of my Deanship, an Associate Dean and I began developing a College Needs Assessment as described above.

After determining the gross need, we decided to try to obtain one huge gift to get the endowment program underway. We started by searching the *Directory of Texas Foundations* for a foundation that would fit our needs and whose interests would equate with ours. We ran across the B. G. Hardin Foundation whose founder had lifetime business ventures that paralleled the subjects of our various departments in the College. He had owned advertising agencies, newspapers, radio and TV stations and had been a public figure who gave frequent lectures and other varieties of speeches. That matched our departments of Advertising, Journalism, Radio-TV-Film, and Communication Studies.

We discovered further that the B. G. Hardin Foundation gave about ten million dollars a year in gifts and that the largest amount ever given to one entity in one year was one million dollars. Most of the gifts were awarded to educational and arts institutions. We had found our target. We then decided to ask for five million dollars to be awarded at the rate of one million dollars a year for five years. Now the question, "What could we offer the Foundation for its beneficence?"

We obtained the University President's approval to offer to name the three building communication complex after the founder of the Foundation, James Sheath, and a variety of other endowments in the College which are detailed in the proposal produced below.

The next step was to find the person who could represent the College and make the request on our behalf. We searched for several months for the right person. We finally discovered a person who had been asked previously to be President of the Endowment and who was also a friend of the College, although not an alumnus. The person we wanted to make the presentation agreed to do so. He was a much respected figure generally in the state and especially respected by the members of the Board of Directors of the B. G. Hardin Foundation.

It took two years, but we finally had all the pegs in the right holes. We found the right foundation, we arrived at what we thought was an appropriate amount of money to request and the period over which the gift would be paid out, we worked out the reasons we thought the foundation would profit from the gift, and we found the right person to make the presentation on our behalf.

Now we had to design the proposal. It is reproduced here.

PROPOSAL TO B. G. HARDIN FOUNDATION

The College of Communication at The University of Texas at Austin proposes to the B. G. Hardin Foundation that it endow the College in the amount of \$5 million, to be paid over a period of five years or more. Should the endowment be approved, we propose to

recommend that the building complex which houses the College be named the "James Sheath Communication Center." This proposal is based on several factors.

First, the late James Sheath, who, with Mrs. Sheath, founded the B. G. Hardin Foundation in 1902, embodied in the early years of the century what we believe to be today's hallmarks of communication. He was involved first with newspapers, then, as technology progressed, with radio and television, Mr. Sheath was a public lecturer, had advertising agencies, and served in government and civic service at several levels. Over the years Mr. Sheath and the B. G. Hardin Foundation maintained a long-standing institutional and professional association with the old School of Journalism and the College of Communication through an endowed James Sheath Professorship and twelve scholarships in his name. Additionally, many University graduates have worked for newspapers and television and radio stations in which Mr. Sheath had an interest.

Second, Mr. Sheath was a man of vision in communication as well as a builder and planner. We believe that the progressive growth of the College of Communication and its potential for leadership are consistent with the progressive spirit Mr. Sheath embodied.

Third, an endowment of this nature seems most appropriate at this time in view of the Centennial celebration of The University of Texas at Austin, which will culminate in 1983. This significant gift would help the University attain first-class leadership among major academic institutions—the stated goal of the Centennial.

Fourth, an endowment of this size and scope would help the College of Communication at The University of Texas at Austin to achieve its potential: to be the finest College of Communication in the nation.

Should the endowment be provided, we would propose to allocate the funds as follows:

SUGGESTED USES OF PROPOSED ENDOWMENT

Investment Categories	Endowment	Estimated Annual Income
Faculty Development Program (Faculty leaves, travel, research, guest lecturers)	\$1,500,000	\$127,500
Student Scholarships/Fellowships	500,000	42,500
Chairs and Professorships (2 chairs, 4 professorships)	1,400,000	119,000
Public Conferences and Development	1,100,000	93,500
College Placement Bureau	500,000	42,000
TOTAL	\$5,000,000	\$425,000

The Endowment for Faculty Development Programs would provide financial support, which is not available through legislative funds. The endowment would help us to attract and retain outstanding faculties throughout the College, and it would make possible faculty leaves for research or travel to professional meetings, faculty research grants for projects to be conducted at The University, and funds for guest lecturers.

We recommend \$500,000 for student scholarships and fellowships. Since the bulk of our existing endowments are for scholarships and fellowships, and since we have prospects for additional endowments in the near future, we have allocated a lesser amount in this category. The scholarships and fellowships endowed through this gift could be named by donor.

We currently have one James Sheath Professorship in the College of Communication. The endowment recommended for chairs and professorships in this proposal would help provide for two chairs and four additional professorships. Each of the chairs and professorships could also be named by the donor.

The Advisory Council is particularly interested in the endowment for public conferences and development. The income from this endowment would help to support an office which would administer conferences and extend our continuing education programs.

The income from funds endowed for the College Placement Bureau would permit the College to expand its present services and more effectively help our graduates find appropriate employment.

Two years of detailed work paid off with the approval of this request. Without question, the availability of matching funds for the chairs and professorships was doubly enticing, but we believe the request would have been approved without the matching funds, especially since the matching funds applied only to the chairs and professorships.

EXAMPLE TWO: A REQUEST FOR A \$100,000 GIFT

Success with the 5-million dollar request whetted the appetite for more. My Associate Dean and I had another series of sessions to fashion another large gift. In the process of examining the *Directory of Texas Foundations* once again, it struck us that two of the foundations in the Directory were established by founders of significant newspapers in the state of Texas. How do we design a campaign to get to those foundations?

We reexamined the B. G. Hardin proposal for some help in invigorating our creativity. In so doing, we realized that James Sheath was an early (pioneer) newspaper publisher in Texas, as were the founders of two of the foundations we discovered in the Directory. We learned further that there were two additional pioneer publishers who were not attached to foundations, but who had families with significant means, making a total of five "Pioneer Texas Publishers." Thus, we created the Pioneer Texas Publishers Endowment proposal in the College. We decided to ask for five relatively small gifts of \$100,000 for a total endowment of \$500,000.

We followed all six steps in the process of planning the campaign. We reinforced our credibility by finding members of the boards of directors of each foundation, or former members, who were also graduates of the University to represent us. In some cases we found just a good friend of the chairman of the board or of the families of the two pioneers not attached to foundations. The letter produced below is a sample of a letter that was sent on our behalf by a member of our Advisory Council to his friend on the board of one of the foundations.

SAMPLE LETTER

DEAR _____:

The College of Communication at the University of Texas at Austin is making an effort to secure professorships in the names of pioneer Texas publishers. As you probably are aware, the College already has an endowed position honoring James F. Sheath and is in negotiation with other foundations to honor other early Texas publishers. In talking with Bob Jeffrey, Dean of the College, George Christian, and other members of the College Foundation Advisory Council, I believe we can develop a plan which, with your approval and support, will provide for a George Custer Professorship in Communication and a matching professorship in the name of Jane Ann Custer in the College of Fine Arts.

The funding required for a professorship is \$100,000. During the Centennial celebration of the University of Texas at Austin, the Board of Regents is authorized to match

dollar for dollar any contribution to establish a faculty endowment. Consequently, under the Centennial Teachers and Scholars Program, it would be possible to match a \$100,00 contribution by the Custer Foundation with \$100,00 from the Board of Regents. With this matching program, it would be possible to have the George Custer Centennial Professorship in Communication and the Jane Ann Custer Centennial Professorship in Fine Arts.

I think it is important that you know that the pledge of \$100,00 has to be submitted to the University by May 15, 1983 and the pledge has to be fulfilled by May 15, 1985 in order for the gift to qualify for the Centennial Teachers and Scholars (Matching Fund) Program. Consequently, it would be possible to make a pledge of \$100.00 to establish the George Custer Centennial Professorship in Communication during the 1982 calendar year and fulfill the pledge with four \$25,000 payments in 1982, 1983, 1984, and by May 15, 1985. Any combination of annual gifts that would fulfill the \$100,000 pledge by May 15, 1985 would be possible.

I will be happy to supply any additional information you may wish in assisting you to make a decision.

Sincerely,

Note that the letter spells out clearly what is expected of the foundation and what benefit the foundation will receive from the University. It details the specifics of payment. This letter was modified modestly for presentation to the families. It was effective, as were various forms of it to other foundations and to families, and we achieved the \$500,000 goal.

CONCLUSION

This paper does not purport to be an extensive lesson in fund-raising. It is a description of a strategy I used as a novice fund-raiser with no help from a development officer when I assumed an office that required raising private money for the college. Although I used two examples of fairly substantial amounts of money, I made many requests for \$25,000 and \$50,000. I want to emphasize that to raise significant amounts of private funds, the fund-raiser should be bold and imaginative. It takes time and thought to create the idea for a campaign, to plan the strategy, and to achieve the goal.

I have not touched on many activities that are required of the fund-raiser at an academic institution. He or she must keep in touch with the President and/or the development officer charged with the fund-raising activities for the college or university. The development officer will tell you that you must keep in touch with your potential targets with visitations, phone and mail contacts.

With all of the responsibilities of fund-raisers, the Aristotelian principles served me well, and I suggest they will serve anyone well if he or she is willing to give it the time and effort required. Remember that all good fund-raising efforts begin with establishing credibility, maybe by forming an advisory committee of distinguished alumni or friends, and is executed by assessing needs, defining the audience, designing the message, reinforcing credibility, and making the ask.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

Robert C. Jeffrey (Ph.D., University of Iowa, 1957) is the Allan Shivers Centennial Chair Emeritus in Communication and former Dean of the College of Communication at the University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712.