



IN PERSON: Asking for Contributions StewardShop 102

Description

“In Person” is a 55-minute workshop that gives participants an opportunity to develop their skills in person-to-person asking for contributions. The workshop features a series of guided-practice experiences, with basic information about the fundamental elements of requesting contributions.

Audience

“In Person” helps pastors and stewardship leaders in congregations who may have experienced some reluctance or difficulty in their personal approach to requesting contributions.

Skills

Participants in this workshop will sharpen their skill in face-to-face requests for contributions from members of the congregation, in three connected arenas of contributions: annual pledge, special gift and first-time giving.

Materials

Handout, “Soliciting Contributions,” one per participant

Handout, “Asking Practice,” one per participant

Schedule

Presentation, “How to Ask”	(15 minutes)
Practice Conversation 1 (Annual Pledge)	(10 minutes)
Practice Conversation 2 (Special Gift)	(10 minutes)
Practice Conversation 3 (First-time Giver)	(10 minutes)
Large Group Debriefing	(10 minutes)

WORKSHOP DESIGN

Presentation, “How to Ask”

(15 minutes)

The workshop begins with a presentation about the basics of “asking,” using the items on the handout, “Soliciting Contributions.” Distribute a copy of the handout to each of the participants, providing them a few minutes to scan the sheet.

Begin the presentation with a few comments about Items 1 – 3. Move to Item 7, amplifying the conversation outline with these notes or ideas from your own experience:

Opening

Establish rapport with the giver by talking about comfortable and familiar subjects, including the person’s daily work or activities. (“What occupies your time during the week?” is a good question for givers with whom you are unfamiliar.) You are helping the prospective giver turn attention to the congregation or the task at hand.

(Re)establishing a relationship

Bring the subject of your congregation into the conversation. (“One of the things I like about our congregation is how it helps me get through my week. That’s why I’m talking with you now.”) Involve the giver in a few moments of conversation – and questions – about how well the congregation is fulfilling its mission, how exciting the prospects for the future, or the giver’s connection to some aspect of congregational life. Listen without defensiveness, and exult without gushing.

Presenting the case

Take the conversation to the next step by explaining to the giver what lies ahead for your congregation, describing the financial elements of future planning. Be positive, and be open to a giver’s questions.

“The ask”

Now you ask for a gift. (“I’d like you to support the mission of God in our congregation with your money;” “What is your decision about the level of your financial support in the coming year?” or “What amount do you hope to contribute [weekly/monthly] in the coming year?”) Statements of invitation also serve as an “ask.” For example, “I’d like to invite you to contribute an additional 1% of your income this coming year.”

Complete the presentation about asking by highlighting Item 12.

Next, explain that in the next 30 minutes, participants will have the chance to practice three distinct kinds of asking for contributions, each with its particular nuances and possibilities. In groups of three -- one asker, one giver, and one observer – participants will engage in a five-minute conversation, and spend the remaining five minutes in debriefing the experience.

Divide into groups of three participants. Distribute copies of the handout, “Asking Practice,” one per participant. Direct each group to quickly choose who will be the first asker, giver and observer.

Practice Conversation 1 (Annual Pledge) (10 minutes)

As soon as groups are formed, they can begin an asking conversation that might take place during an annual program of mission funding. The observer takes notes and keeps track of time. The subject and circumstances of the conversation can be found on the handout. At the end of five minutes, the observer ends the practice conversation and debriefs the experience, using these two questions (found on the reverse side of the handout):

- What did you notice about the quality of the “ask?” (How direct was it, how specific, how lacking apologies, etc.)
- What would you encourage the “asker” to consider as his/her primary personal skills in the matter of asking for contributions?

Practice Conversation 2 (Special Gift) (10 minutes)

The second conversation begins immediately, on the subject of special gifts. (The handout, “Asking Practice,” sets the scene and the task.) Members of each small group switch roles, so that they are taking on a new role. After five minutes, the observer brings the conversation to a halt and the debriefing takes places, using these questions:

- Compare the ease or difficulty of this conversation, compared to the previous one.
- What special skills do this kind of asking conversation call for?
- What special quality or ability did you notice in the asking person?

Practice Conversation 3 (First-time Giver) (10 minutes)

The final practice conversation takes place, with a focus on asking first-time givers for their contribution. (An optional focus: Asking a current giver to consider the practice of completing a pledge or commitment form.) Members of each small group switch roles one more time, each member taking a new role (observer, asker, giver). After five minutes, the observer ends the conversation and debriefing begins, focusing on these matters:

- How did the conversation's content change the tone or nature of "the ask?"
- What new dynamics occurred between asker and giver?
- What special quality or ability did you notice in the asking person?

Large Group Debriefing

(10 minutes)

The final segment of the workshop offer the group an opportunity to share their reactions and thoughts to each other, as a kind of "peer mentoring." During this time encourage participants to offer their observations to the entire group; in this way they can teach and encourage each other!

Use questions or discussion statements such as these to complete the learning experience. (These items are also found on the reverse side of the handout, "Asking Practice.")

- What qualities or skills that you already possess make asking for contributions possible?
- How do you know when your asking ability is effective?
- What kind of asking-for-contributions did you enjoy the most? Why
- Where in this process do you feel God's power and guidance?

Conclude the workshop with a short prayer, and dismiss participants with your thanks for their wisdom and commitment to God's mission.



Soliciting Contributions

Principles and Guidelines for Asking

The simple act of asking fellow believers for their contributions can be a daunting prospect. Use these principles and guidelines as assurance of your capabilities to boldly request funding of your congregation's part of God's mission.

- 1. Remember what God does first.** Because of Word and Sacrament ministry, because you are a group of God's Spirit-blessed people, and because you share with each other some basic assumptions about living your lives of faith, you can assume that God has visited the giver before you. God's Spirit has graced this person with gifts and commitment and a sense of self beyond "selfish and greedy." You're continuing with God's first visit!
- 2. Remember why people give.** Because they are asked! People don't give to budgets, or to causes. They give to people who ask, people with passion. That's you! Your visit isn't finished until you ask for a gift.
- 3. Remember why people don't give.** Donors do not respond readily or repeatedly to guilt, shame, manipulation or judgment of their motives. They are acutely aware of spiritual abuse, subtle or explicit, and respond accordingly.
- 4. Givers want to give.** It is emotionally and spiritually rewarding to give money for God's mission to take place, in the congregation and around the world. People who contribute are affirmed by their giving. They see themselves as who they most want to be: generous participants in what God is doing! By asking them to give you provide an opportunity for something good to happen.
- 5. Don't worry about being rejected.** This fear is natural, but it's not helpful. Instead, think of the people you ask as able and willing to say "Yes!" to your request. Remember that a negative response is not about you!
- 6. Don't worry about hypocrisy.** Whether the shortcomings are yours alone or specific to the giver, don't let imagined hypocrisy keep you from asking another person to be generous to your congregation. Both of you are forgiven sinners.
- 7. Use silence.** Provide times of silence in which the giver can consider what you have said. Give opportunities for the giver to ask questions or make comments.

8. **You are not asking for yourself.** Keep this in mind: You're asking for contributions that fund *what God is doing for the world*. Your invitation to give is an appeal to something bigger than either you or the giver can do by yourselves. By your asking, you continue what God has first set in motion: the creation, redemption and sanctification of the whole world.
9. **The asking conversation is simple.** The interaction between you and a prospective giver has these parts:
 - Opening – Settling into a normal conversation.
 - (Re-)establishing a relationship – You and the other person involve each other in what's important.
 - Presenting the case – You tell the giver the reasons for your invitation.
 - "The ask" – You ask confidently for a gift or commitment from the giver, and in what amount.
 - Thanking – You assure the giver of the importance of the gift, and express your gratitude on behalf of your congregation.
10. **Don't apologize.** Subtle negativism – "just" and "only" can be signs of this kind of thinking – and apologies spoil the quality of your witness and the effect of your asking.
11. **Assure the giver.** Tell the giver how the contributions will be used in important ways. Portray positively the vision of decision-makers and others who you represent. Deal with objections and refusals in a courteous, appreciative manner.
12. **Communicate your passion.** You are not there only to listen appreciatively; your end task is to ask for a gift from this giver. That makes your own passion for the cause or program or congregation a necessary ingredient in the asking process. Tell why you are excited; explain at what level you are contributing your time and money to the effort; share your own emotions about this matter. The giver will react positively to your witness.
13. **Thank the giver.** You leave the giver with your gratitude, and the gratitude of the congregation. First, for faithful stewardship in daily life – doing God's will every day of the week. Second, for the giver's financial response to God's blessings in the past. Third, for the gift that has been given now, or the promised commitment to that gift.



Asking Practice Worksheet for Conversations

Use this worksheet to record your observations about your experiences in three separate kinds of asking: annual fund appeal, special gifts, and first-time giver. Be ready to talk about your feelings, your passion and your capabilities for this necessary leadership activity.

Conversation 1 – Annual pledge

(You are visiting a giver whose regular contributions seem to be steady, and whose life circumstances make continued or increased contributions likely.)

NOTES: _____

Conversation 2 – Special gift

(You are having dessert – in a restaurant – with a couple who you will ask to contribute a significant gift for a hunger-related project/program of your congregation or the wider church, or for a capital campaign.)

NOTES: _____

Conversation 3 – First-time giver

(You will visit a new Christian, someone who is excited about your congregation, but may not understand about “regular contributions” or “pledging/commitments.” OPTION: You will talk with a giver who you will encourage to formalize his/her commitment for financial support in a written pledge or commitment.)

NOTES: _____

Conversation 1

- What did you notice about the quality of the “ask?” (How direct was it, how specific, how lacking apologies, etc.)
- What would you encourage the “asker” to consider as his/her primary personal skills in the matter of asking for contributions?

Conversation 2

- Compare the ease or difficulty of this conversation, compared to the previous one.
- What special skills do this kind of asking conversation call for?
- What special quality or ability did you notice in the asking person?

Conversation 3

- How did the conversation’s content change the tone or nature of “the ask?”
- What new dynamics occurred between asker and giver?
- What special quality or ability did you notice in the asking person?

Debriefing the experience

- What qualities or skills that you already possess make asking for contributions possible?
- How do you know when your asking ability is effective?
- What kind of asking-for-contributions did you enjoy the most? Why?
- Where in this process do you feel God’s power and guidance?