

First Time,
Next Time,
All the Time:

A Plan for 1st Time Donors.



by

Mark Brooks

The Stewardship Coach



THE STEWARDSHIP COACH

REVERSING THE DECLINE IN GIVING

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Setting the Stage for Success

“My goal in preaching is for you to come back next week and bring a friend.” I once heard Andy Stanley say that at a preaching conference. I have a similar goal for you. **My goal is that someone will give the first time to your church, then the second time, third time until they become a generous donor.** To achieve this goal you need a plan. This manual is all about helping you devise and implement such a plan.

Before we can start however we need to establish a few things. We need to set the stage for success by understanding a few key points. **First, how effective a plan you have depends upon, you!** You are either your own worst enemy or your own best friend when it comes to increasing giving and givers. If you don't believe in the importance of increasing giving and givers this manual will only sit and collect dust. If you don't see the need then it will never be implemented. Frankly the biggest hurdle I have to overcome when I start working with churches is their own staff usually starting with the Senior Pastor!

The best way to combat this is with the right attitude. Actions always follow attitude. If your attitude is positive your plan will be positive AND get implemented. Without the right attitude, again, this manual is worthless to you. What should your attitude be? Here it is...

No other organization on the face of the earth can do what your church can do. Therefore it is worth giving money to. Since your church is changing the world for the better why would you NOT ask people to give to support your Kingdom building work? Since all this is true you will never shy away from asking people to support your cause because your cause is God's cause!

If you adapt that attitude you will have a better chance of being fully funded AND attracting new donors on a regular basis. So, get the above firmly fixed in your mind and adapt it as the attitude that everyone on your staff or finance team needs to adapt. Start with you!

The next key is that you have to start right to end right. You will not get a first time gift using guilt or coercion. You have to do what I call connecting the dots. By this I mean you need to show donors how a gift to your church works towards advancing God's work. You want to make people WANT to give not feel like they have to give. I believe we should give. However let's work on starting them on the generosity journey first. So make every appeal compelling. We will talk more about this later but I want to start your thinking about this crucial area. Whether we like it or not to gain that first gift we have to earn it with the right message.

Have a plan! Churches have plans for just about everything except giving. Churches that have giving plans and work their plans are more likely to be fully funded than those that don't. **Failing to have a plan means you are planning on failure!** So, let's get a first time giving plan in place.

Work your plan! That is the last foundational piece we need to establish before we lay out the plan. You have to work the plan. Too many churches fail simply because they don't put any work or effort into the process. Without working on increasing giving and givers it is doubtful if you ever will. So, get ready to get to work!

Why You Need a First Time Giver Plan

First, it shows you value their gift and that they are not simply another number. Few people ever show true gratitude. **Do you say thank you enough when it comes to your donors?** Saying thank you is one of the biggest overlooked needs for churches. Too many have the attitude that saying thank you to donors is wrong. Here is a real life example.

Several years ago a pastor asked me to write for him various letters on giving. As I met with him I remarked that in their recent stewardship campaign they never sent out a thank you letter to those who committed to the campaign. The pastor said, "I think it is inappropriate to say thank you to people for what they should be doing." That ended our meeting! I went home and told my wife what the pastor had said. Her reply was priceless...

"When is gratitude ever inappropriate?"

Exactly! I know Christians should give. Yet what is wrong with saying thank you? How is showing gratitude wrong? Frankly it is not. Have you ever resented someone saying thank you to you? Probably never. Yet when someone doesn't say thank you it does make an impact.

To increase giving and givers you need to regularly say thank you to your donors. Non-profits put the church to shame with regards to this. One reason why they do this is that a thank you builds the platform for the next ask. Here is my view of thank you's...

Thank yous are the most positive reminder of giving you can make!

I am always trying to build for the next gift. I want people to give once, then again and again until they get the joy of generosity. Saying thank you builds towards the next gift.

If we show we value the donor they are much more apt to donate again!

Second reason you need a First Time Giver Plan, is that it sets you apart from the crowd.

Here is a story from one of my members Pastor Brian Hughes of Powhatan Community Church now simply known as PCC. This story shows how impactful saying thank you to a first time donor can be. Pastor Brian wrote me the following. "I send a thank you card to every first time giver every week. Got this note and thought I'd share it with you."

"WOW! Everything about PCC continually blows me away and exceeds all of my expectations! I never, in a million years, would have ever expected a hand-written, personalized thank you note from the pastor of a church (especially one as large as PCC) for my gift. You are a class-act through & through and I feel so incredibly blessed to be a part of your church family! Thank you and may God bless you for the gifts you bestow upon our hearts & souls every week!"

The woman wrote back to the pastor because she was amazed he responded. Obviously that had never happened to her before. PCC has a much better chance of getting another gift from this woman simply because the pastor took the time to say thank you.

One final reason you need a First Time Giver Plan of Action is that you are continually losing donors. We track clients giving and most average anywhere from a 15% to 20% loss in

givers EVERY year. For instance one of my clients is one of the top fastest growing Methodist churches in America. Last year they grew their donor base by 7%. However they lost 17% of the 2015 donors losing 119. They gained 167 new donors though for a net gain of 48. Remember they are a fast growing church.

For over twenty years I have been looking at financial giving analysis of hundreds of churches. I have looked at churches with annual budgets close to \$50 million to those of \$100K. The one thing I can tell you is that every church loses donors each year. Some die, some move away and some simply stop coming or giving. You can count on the fact that you too will lose donors this year no matter what you do. So you can see how important it is to add new donors.

The final reason you need a First Time Giver Plan of Action is that it paves the way for the next gift! As I said earlier, a thank you is the most positive reminder of giving there is. Your thank you note or letter builds a bridge to the next “ask.”

Before we start on your plan there is one more thing that we need to learn. How to make an “ask.”

The Art of the Ask

If you are going to be fully funded AND attract new donors you have to know the Art of the Ask. First you have to say that carefully and slowly! Yet no matter how good a first time giver program you have if you don't know the art of the ask you will get few first time gifts. You will certainly never get the second gift.

Knowing what motivates people to give is the first step in developing The Art of the Ask!

Studies show that people give based upon three broad criteria. First and foremost they have to believe in the vision of the organization. Secondly, they have to have trust in the leadership of that organization. Finally, they have to have confidence in the fiscal responsibility of the organization. In other words they want to know that the money they give goes to the cause they are giving it to. Violate any of these three and you will not be fully funded.

Before we start talking about what does motivate people to give let me spend some time talking about **what doesn't motivate people to give.** What few realize is that you can actually ask in such a way that you drive potential donors away rather than attract them.

A few years ago I wrote a book entitled, **"The Top Ten Stewardship Mistakes Churches Make."** One of the chapters was called, "Failing to Ask." It showed that contrary to popular opinion most churches never talk about money. The next chapter was entitled, "Asking to Fail." Here is the opening sentence, "We have established that churches are failing to ask but what might surprise you is that a major stewardship mistake is that churches ask in a way that leads to failure." I then laid out the most often used tactic churches use to gain donations, guilt.

Guilt or telling people they ought to give never works. Oh, it might get a short spike in that week's offering but it will not change minds and hearts. The reason why is...

Guilt puts burdens on people's backs. Love puts a passion in people's hearts.

There have been multiple studies done on what motivates people or what their life goals are. One thing that always come out is that people want their lives to make a difference. That means vary things but the point is that we want to exist for meaning and purpose. When it comes to deciding whether to give or not to your church the same is true. They give to what they deem has value and significance. So...

To get people to give...

- **Show members what their gifts to your church have accomplished for the Kingdom.**
- **Show members what future gifts will do for the Kingdom.**
- **Show them God's promises to those that do give.**
- **Be positive rather than negative.**
- **Never give up asking!**

People will give when they know their gift matters. I believe the vast majority of Christians know they ought to give. Why is it then that most of our conversation and preaching is what I

call “ought to preaching.” Instead why not show them what their gifts do? The best way to motivate people to give is to show them that their gift matters.

Get a story, work your story, tell people about your story and people will want to give to support that story. That is one of my life mantras. Doing this creates a passion within people that makes them WANT to give. To gain the first time gift you need a compelling story! That is your appeal.

Your appeal or “ask” must motivate people to give. So, make it about more than simply making budget. Tell them why making budget is important. Every “ask” needs a driver. A driver is the motivation that gets me to dip into my pocket and give you more money.

The vision of your church is the beginning place to start with your appeal. Your vision is the driver for the “ask.” I always counsel clients to make the vision, Clear, Concise and most of all Compelling! Also, there are three basic elements of every “ask” ...

Crisis – I want my donors to know about...

Need – We can help by...

Ask – Your gift NOW will help us meet this need!

Let me add one other crucial element, thanking the donor for their gift.

These four elements form the legs to The Art of the Ask. The better job you do with these elements determines whether or not you will be fully funded. Learn the Art of the Ask and you will be funded!

Practical Steps for a First Time Giver Plan of Action – Here are the major things to keep in mind as you establish your own plan of action...

- Track all gifts so you know when someone gives the first time. At the same time track what the first time gift was given to whether the regular offering or a special offering. I also want you to track those that give for the first time online whether they are regular donors or not.
- Write a personalized note to each first time giver. I like to have the Senior Pastor write a personalized note in their own writing. This shows you have taken the time to honor their gift. By the way the story I told about Pastor Brian Hughes writing each first time donor a thank you card needs to be set into context. His church runs over 1,500 a week. If he can find time to personally write a thank you note you can too!
- Within a week of their gift send out a letter again thanking them for their gift. I like to include some type of gift in the letter such as a pen or even a CD of a sermon. See the sample section.
- Send another letter of appeal to them in a few months encouraging them to give in support of some type of missions or ministry. This is one reason why you want to make sure that you can track what they gave to the first time. If it was a missions offering then circle back with another mission opportunity and ask for another gift.
- If you hold Financial Peace or a similar program send an invitation to them to join. Helping your members learn how to be good stewards of what God has given them will help the stewardship of their giving!
- Keep them on your list and keep periodically working that list!

It is that simple. Does it require some work? Yes, but the return on that investment will pay off for you in new donors.

Sample Section – Here are sample of real letters and emails that I have written for churches. You can edit their name inserting your name and send them out!

Dear

Thank you for your recent gift to Community Church. According to our records your recent gift to Community Church may have been your first gift. I wanted to take the time to thank you for your generosity. Your gift allows us to fulfill our purpose to **List your vision statement here**. So thank you for helping us accomplish our mission.

I also wanted to write and let you know that we take seriously all gifts given to our church. You can be assured that your gift is used to fund the many missions and ministry endeavors of our church. I have included in this packet a document that outlines what we do with the funds that we receive. Community Church maintains the highest standards of integrity when it comes to the tithes and offerings of our members and attendees. You will be receiving quarterly and year end giving statements of all your gifts to Community Church. If you have any questions about your giving record you can contact our church financial office at (XXX) 555-3817 and ask for _____. You can also email us at office@communitychurch.com

Your gifts to Community Church do make a difference. Our gifts do make a difference. Here is an example of the impact we are making...**List your own story below!**

Just a few weeks ago I had the privilege of preaching a funeral for one of our members who died very suddenly after being diagnosed with lung problems. In fact he died just two weeks after the diagnosis. Yet he was ready. For you see back in May of 2007 he accepted Christ as his Savior and it radically changed his life. He was baptized here at this church and grew in faith here. This didn't just happen. It happened in part because faithful people supported this church through their gifts. **I firmly believe that gifts like yours allow us to tell stories like this!**

So again thank you for your gift and for considering further gifts to Community Church. We believe there are hundreds of other stories yet to be told and your faithfulness will help us see them become a reality. May God bless you!

Sincerely,

Dr.

PS. I have included a special CD of a sermon that you might find helpful.

We recommend you include something in the letter or envelope to first time givers that shares what your church is about.

Email sample to online givers after first time gift

Email sample to online givers

To: First Time Givers

From: Dr. Ronnie Floyd

Subject: Thank you for your gift!

Hi Mark,

I want to thank you for your financial gift to Cross Church this past week. According to our records, this was the first time you have given online. I hope you found our online giving simple and easy to use.

We appreciate your gift for helping support what we are doing here at **Cross Church**. Not only does your gift honor God but it allows us to fulfill our mission statement of *Reaching Northwest Arkansas, America and the World for Jesus Christ*. We believe a gift to **Cross Church** is a gift that keeps on giving.

I wanted to let you know that as with all gifts your online gift is 100% tax deductible. If you have any questions about your giving record you can contact our church financial office at 479-751-4523 and ask for **insert contact person**. You can also email her at staff@CrossChurch.com

We believe that a big part of being a disciple of Christ is giving to support His Church. As you may know we provide a multitude of different ways in which you can give. Not only can you give a onetime gift by using your debit or credit card but you can also set up a recurring gift as well. Again, this can be set up through your debit or credit card or through an automatic withdrawal. To find out more information about the various ways you can give go to <http://crosschurch.com/give/>

So once again, thank you for your generosity. May God bless you!

Sincerely,

Bro. Ronnie

PS. If you would like to know how to better manage your finances we offer classes designed to help you in this area. For more information go to <http://crosschurch.com/groups/financial-peace-university--fay/39/>

Sample Follow Up Letter

Dear _____,

We are continuing to change lives one person at a time because of the generosity of our First Church family! Every day First Church impacts the lives of many people. Some need counseling, others need financial help while others need a visit, a prayer or simply someone to listen to them. We are here ministering hope and healing because people like you are generous to First Church!

Not long ago you gave a gift to First Church. It might not seemed like all that big of a deal or even that much money. Yet what we want all who give to understand is that what all of us can do giving together is greater than what a few can do. Your gift was used to help us extend and build the Kingdom. We were grateful you gave.

I wanted to write you about another opportunity that you may be interested in. **List some ministry or mission work. Here is my sample.** Every year we provide backpacks for children who come from needy families. Each backpack is filled with the basics that a child needs for school. Not only does it have school supplies but it also contains some treats. We give this to any and every child who attends our special event. The cost for each one is about \$25 which includes not only the backpack but all the contents.

Your gift of \$25 will buy a backpack for some deserving child. For the next several weeks we will be taking up funds to provide for this needed ministry of our church. Since you have given before I wanted to let you know about this opportunity and ask you to consider another gift to First Church. Our backpack program is one of many things we do throughout the year to impact our community with the love of Christ. Each costs us something but our First family is always generous in their support. We would love to have you join us in supporting this venture with a generous gift today!

Thanks for your consideration of helping those in our community experience the love of Christ. May we who have been blessed return that blessing to others!

Sincerely,

Pastor Bob

PS. You can easily give to First Church by going to our website at <http://FIRSTCHURCH.ORG/GIVE> Follow the easy instructions on how to give.