

## PRESENTING A SUCCESSFUL PAC SOLICITATION: LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY

By Michael E. Dunn

Research consistently shows that people are more afraid of making speeches than they are of dying. For those of us making speeches to convince others to support their PAC, I can only imagine the fear factor rises exponentially.

As someone who has made thousands of such presentations, I have learned some hard lessons about how to be successful. PAC solicitations are always a percentage game. Any solicitation effort, no matter how poorly executed, will produce some positive response. The object, however, is to consistently increase that positive response into meaningful percentages that make a real impact for your PAC.

Some PAC professionals believe that if they can only get their audiences to understand the facts, the pledges to the PAC will naturally follow. In my experience, if that were true, we would all be great PAC solicitors. There is much more going on in a solicitation than just presenting the facts or making a request for money. The more you understand the following truisms of solicitation, the more successful you will be.

- Nobody wants to buy what you are selling. Even if your audience understands the impact of political decisions on the company, industry or profession, most have not made the connection between the outcome of political decisions and any personal decisions they might make about the PAC. Unless this connection is made, they will not want to contribute to the PAC after your presentation.
- Senior leadership endorsement helps the credibility of your appeal. Without the involvement of senior leadership, you are simply someone from the government affairs department who is asking someone else to help you do your job.
- The presentation has to be relevant. This means your presentation must include issues that directly impact the group being addressed. These may be local, state or federal legislation or regulation or internal issues affecting your organization in which the PAC can be viewed at least as a partial remedy.
- No one gives money to a PAC, because your message or PowerPoint slides are really cool. Unless they can relate to the presenter, the message will be lost within the first few minutes of the presentation. Although the PAC is a very serious program, don't take yourself too seriously. Humor, and especially self-deprecating humor, is an excellent way to disarm people who are already skeptical about you and your message.

- You will not convince everyone. No presentation can convince everyone in your audience that the PAC deserves their financial support. If you get 30% of the participants to join the PAC, you are a hitting a home run. Put another way, in the best of circumstances, on average, 70% of the attendees are going to reject what you are asking them to do. You have to control the presentation and the questions asked to keep those who will decline to participate from diminishing the impact of your presentation on the 30% who might participate.
- Address tough questions up front in your presentation. If you know that there are questions and concerns that exist about the PAC, make sure you cover them in your presentation. Concerns addressed as a part of a presentation give people a good reason to participate. Concerns addressed as a result of questions asked after the presentation give people a good reason not to give.
- Address all legally required statements in your presentation. But, don't do it all at one time. Lumping all of the required legal statements into one PowerPoint slide makes people nervous. Legal mumbo jumbo can give people the wrong impression about the PAC. Many feel that the PAC is marginally legal anyway. Putting all of the legal statements together helps reinforce this perception.
- Close the sale. This means more than just asking people to join the PAC. It means collecting contribution forms as a part of the meeting. My experience has been that unless people are given an opportunity to respond at the time of the request, your response rate will suffer greatly. As a result, if your pitch is part of another meeting, make sure that there is a break immediately after your presentation so they will have time to complete the form. This does not mean that all who will contribute will do so immediately. Yet, not asking for an immediate commitment undercuts your message about how important the PAC really is.
- Opinions about politics and government are like noses – everyone has one. A realistic understanding of the political and governmental process is more like 20/20 vision – not everyone is so lucky. As a result, educating people about politics and government is an essential element in converting them to PAC participants.
- Hold questions to the end of your presentation. To avoid having one bad apple spoil the entire barrel, ask that all questions be held until you finish your presentation. If your presentation is not interrupted with questions, what you have to say will be more powerful. It also prevents the tone of the meeting from being set by someone else who may have an attitude about your organization, politics, PACs or you.

By recognizing and respecting these truisms of PAC solicitations, you can significantly increase the positive responses to your PAC appeal. Remember, you know more about PACs and politics than anyone else in the room. Approach your presentation with confidence and make it a performance, not just a speech.