



Your donor should get more joy out of giving to your organization than they could get out of anything else they could do with their money, charitable or otherwise.

That's the goal. And that doesn't just happen magically. It takes a heart for your donor and a desire to provide a great giving experience. But even that's not enough. First, we need to establish some systems, an attention for detail, a methodical approach at doing lots of little things right.

Many little wows make big WOW.

I like to challenge fundraisers to do things for your donors that people will still be telling stories about 20 years from now. But those big things need to happen after you've already established a baseline of thanks and stewardship.

You get a seat at a poker game by paying your ante. So your ante is doing basic donor services well. Thanking your donors. Sending appropriate gift receipts. Responding to messages and requests. That's your ante, but you don't win a game with your ante. All your ante does is give you a seat at the table.

Paying your ante is committing to doing the basics well.

You want to raise more money? Raising more money will be a lot easier if you have happy donors. Donors who are having joyous giving experiences with your organization. I used to say that Happy Donors are a prerequisite to making an ask, but that's not true. Your donors don't have to be happy before you ask them for a gift. But if you want to close a big gift – if you want your donors to give a big, audacious, stand on their tiptoes gift – you need them to be happy.

You must develop a culture of service, not just encourage random acts of great service.

From, Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service:

“Wowing guests, to borrow a word from Tom Peters, means not only meeting these preconceived notions of what a Disney vacation or film or toy should be, but exceeding them. In the same way, you must first meet and then exceed the expectations of your customers if you are going to build a reputation for Quality Service.

Many companies wow their customers on occasion.... The story will be told and retold and perhaps be added to corporate lore – but then it's back to business as usual. [But] it's the plethora of little wows, many of which seem fairly insignificant at the time, on which Quality

Service depends. If the little wows are delivered consistently and continuously, they add up to a big WOW.”

We can't overcome many missteps with some great act of service. That's not how it works. We first have to meet, and then exceed, expectations.

First, we have to establish a minimum acceptable level of service, then on that foundation we go above and beyond.

Make people feel safe, loved, cared for, and then WOWED!

After a donor gives their first gift to an organization, they should be thanked seven times in the first month. Let me say that again, seven times in the first month!

All active donors should receive seven more thank you's over the course of a calendar year. Just a minimum threshold of thanks, automated and going out to your donors.

Every interaction with a donor is an opportunity to say thank you. You should constantly be looking for ways to put yourself in front of your most important donors.

If you will make it your goal to do a better job of thanking your donors than any other organization, two things will happen:

1. Your donor retention rate will go up.
2. You will experience marginal increases in support from existing donors.

I'm not even talking about major gifts. Not yet. Just do this -- thank your donors -- and you will raise more money. Of course you want more than a marginal increase. Marginal isn't very exciting. But if you just do this, just this one thing, you'll see a marginal increase in support. Then we're ready for the next step, which leads to exponential increases in support.

So this is a lot of thank you's we're talking about! Wouldn't it be nice to have a good quiver full of them that you could pull from?

Well, here you go! The Major Gifts Fundraiser List of ways to thank and steward your donors.

1. Make thank you calls! Make thank you calls to every donor for every single gift, or start with the lowest possible dollar amount your organization can manage.
2. Hand-signed thank you letters. No auto-pen. No "Dear Friend..." A thank you letter should be from one person to one person.
3. If someone gives online, they should receive an automated email. But you should review these gifts to see if they are being given by people you know or are trying to

breakthrough with. Follow-up with a personal email. "I'm sure you received our automated response, but I wanted to make sure you know I saw your gift come through, and I hope you know how much we appreciate your support...."

4. Follow-up a thank you call with a handwritten note. "I sure enjoyed chatting with you and I just wanted to say thanks again for your support..."
5. Return every bit of correspondence from a donor with a thank you note. Development Officers are people who write thank you notes for thank you notes.
6. Write very simple, unprompted thanks. "I simply wanted to write to say thanks..." on small 4X6 cards.
7. Send an advance copy of your newsletter with a personal note. Add a post-it to a particular article. "I didn't want you to miss this..." (If you don't currently have some type of newsletter or report you send out to your donors, you should, but don't start one if you aren't committed to keeping it going.)
8. Interview donors for your newsletter or to send out to your email list. *One development officer told us: "This is very important. I did an interview with a couple who helped build a church in the West Indies and as a result we built a strong friendship. This was a part of the Leadership Circle Newsletter I expanded... I attended their funeral and still remain friends with their family. As a result of that friendship I helped develop a donor into an annual gift of \$10,000 and sometimes more."
9. Send gifts that have some connection to your organization. They don't need to be expensive (better if they're not) or elaborate. Use a gift to tell a story.
10. Starting a building project? Hold a groundbreaking ceremony and invite your top donors to put the first shovels in the ground.
11. Congratulations! You broke ground on a new building! Send a vial of dirt or rock from when you began construction.
12. Your new building is done! Hold a ribbon cutting ceremony. Have your biggest donors hold a great big pair of scissors and get some pictures of them cutting the ribbon.
13. Don't throw the ribbon away! Send pieces of it to some of your most important donors.
14. I'm so glad you made sure you took pictures of your donor cutting the ribbon on your new building. Now have those pictures matted and framed for your donor. Put a little piece of the ribbon inside the framing.
15. You're tearing down an old building? Send your donor a brick and tell them to place it somewhere so they can be reminded of all the lives they touched in that old building.
16. Pay off debt? Hold a note burning ceremony. Frame charred remains of the note your donor helped you pay off.
17. You paid off a debt and burned a note! That's great! Now every year on the anniversary you have an opportunity to again thank your donor!
18. Send photos. Photos of building projects, recipients of your services.
19. Create a page on your website or post on social media with construction updates. Do time lapse videos to show progress.
20. Do we have to mention using social media?
21. Tell stories.

22. Keep coming back to the BIG picture, but give specifics.. “We’re trying to change the world. Here’s how we’re doing that this week.”
23. Make connections. Introduce donors to other staff, volunteers, and students.
24. Ask a donor to write a testimonial about why they support your organization. You could email this out to your entire list, simply print it out and have it in a packet you give to other donors or prospective donors, or add this testimonial to a newsletter.
25. Interview a donor at an event or luncheon, or add an interview to the beginning of a standard event.
26. Invite a donor to lunch with your entire staff.
27. Invite a donor to a “staff briefing.”
28. Ask your donor to address your entire staff to share why they support your organization. This will reinforce in the mind of your donor why they give and these gatherings can be really inspirational for your staff!
29. Make sure your entire staff is trained to ALWAYS thank donors. This should be part of your culture. If you are giving someone a tour of your facilities, you should try to introduce your donor to every single staff member you walk by, whether that person is the Board Chairman or the janitor, and your staff should be going out of their way to stop and say hello, to share a bit of their story, how they came to work for your organization, why they’re passionate about their work, and to say THANK YOU.
30. Invite a donor to address recipients of your services.
31. Send your donors a letter from a recipient of your services. You can do this broadly, as in, having a student write a thank you that is mailed to all of your donors, or you can have a recipient write a single donor a hand-written thank you.
32. Thank you letter from a VIP or board chair.
33. Thank you call from a VIP or board chair.
34. Invite a donor for a tour of your facilities. Include a meeting with a VIP at the end of the tour.
35. Print out or email articles that are related to your area of work and send them to your donors. “I wanted you to see this...” Make sure your donors know you’re thinking about them!
36. Did you just read an article that doesn’t mention you but you read the article and think, “This is why our work is so important?” Send that article to your donor with a note. “This is why our work is so important and why your support matters...”
37. Collect a bunch of handwritten thank you notes from your staff and have them gift wrapped and mailed to your donor. The act of unwrapping a present is so fun!
38. Make a video compilation of your staff and other members of your community saying thanks. Email or text the video to your donor.
39. Get your entire staff together and have them hold a big sign that says, “Thank you!” Have a stack of those on your desk you can send to any donor.
40. Always say thank you. In every interaction, make a point at the end of the meeting to say, “I just wanted to remind you again how much we appreciate your support.... I would be

remiss if I did not mention how much we appreciate your support.... I hope you know how much we appreciate your support..."

41. Send birthday, anniversary, and holiday cards.
42. Send Thanksgiving cards to all of your donors. Prioritize your donors and make as many Thanksgiving Week calls as possible. Make Thanksgiving Day calls to your most important donors, the donors you are closest to. "This time of year as we're drawn to reflect on all we have to be thankful for, I think of you..."
43. Send Veterans Day cards to donors who you know served in the military.
44. Are you an environmental organization? Make sure you do something on Earth Day to thank your donors (broadly and individually). Are you a free market advocacy group? Do something to mark Tax Day. Whatever date on the calendar is yours, OWN it! Make it yours and use it to thank you donors!
45. Make calls at the end of the year. "Wow, what a year, so much success and I was just reflecting and I wanted to call and say, 'We couldn't have done it without you...'"
46. Remind donors how many years they've been giving. Say thank you!
47. Send cards marking the anniversary of the donors first gift. If they gave their first gift, for example, on September 5, 1999, send them a note every September 5 and tell them how many years they've been giving. If they've never missed a year, make a big deal about that! (If they have missed a year or two, you don't need to mention that!)
48. Send a note that says, "You gave your first gift 15 years ago. Since that time, you've given 22 separate gifts totalling \$11,500! We can't thank you enough." Sometimes the total number of gifts is more impressive than the amount. Sometimes the total amount of the gifts is more impressive than the number of gifts. Whichever is more impressive, highlight that number. When both numbers are impressive, hug this donor and never let them go!
49. Remind the donor how "small" the organization was when they gave their first gift 15 years ago, and how far you've come and where you're at now. Add, "You've been with us on this journey. We've come this far because of you..."
50. Naming Opportunities. Name buildings, classrooms, hallways, walkways, streets after donors. Don't "sell" the space. Sell your mission, sell your vision, sell the good work you are doing. Sell changing lives and saving lives. Then add, "And to recognize you for your generosity, we'd like to put your name on our conference center..."
51. Something is happening in a room that's named after a donor. Take a picture and send it to them with a note. "Thanks for your support..."
52. Giving Clubs. People don't give to be a member of your club, but they do like to know where they fit in. Have multiple giving levels. After a while, people will decide for themselves that it's time for them to "move up."
53. Have a board member who made a "lead gift?" Have that donor make thank you calls to those who follow his or her lead!
54. Use a Matching Gift as an opportunity to make a move on your donor. The match may be more about your donor than all the other people who are going to give to the match.

55. Make note of personal preferences and passions of your donor. Do they love unusual teas? If you're traveling and see a specialty tea shop, pick up a gift for your donor. (Treat your donors like friends! That's what they are!).
56. Pay attention to details. If your donor always orders the same drink, make sure you remember this, and next time you're at an event and a bartender asks you for a drink order, order your donor their standard drink.
57. Text your donors. And you thought you could only text your friends? Well, your donors are your friends!