

# HOWARD COUNTY BUSINESS MONTHLY

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## Marketing

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*The More You Give, The  
More You Get... Really*

How many times in the past year have you been asked to donate something for a charity? to buy a raffle ticket to benefit a worthy cause? or...to volunteer your time to help with a project or to serve on a committee?

At least a 20, 30, or 40 times? And, what is your response? Is it the stone-faced, "I've already given..." when, in fact, you didn't give and don't plan to do so? Or, are you the type of person who just can't say no and then feels over-extended and can't fulfill your commitment?

In either case, there is an alternative that doesn't have to conflict with your business objectives and can truly make this world a better place: a happy middle-of-the-road approach to giving and a different way to look at it that may make the donation -- particularly your time -- more justifiable and rewarding to the business.

This middle-of-the-road approach is "strategically" to evaluate your opportunities to give time and/or products or services to ensure that there is the potential for a win-win relationship. That is, from the perspective of a business owner, identify the organizations or causes that not only interest you, but that also will enable you and/or your company name to be in front of people who are either your prospects or referral sources. Then, incorporate this public relations activity into your marketing plan and stick to it.

Remember, giving should be a posi-

tive experience and one that you can justify for personal and business reasons. Just as some of the best deals have been made on golf courses, equally good business relationships develop from the trust and synergy that evolves when you interact with others who share a passion for a common cause.

With that philosophical rhetoric said, here's the nitty gritty with regard to donating time so it's a win-win for the organization and your business. To begin, select one organization or cause that particularly interests you (maybe two?) -- whether it's the Chamber of Commerce and one of its committees, the Animal Welfare League, or any other.

Once you pick your organization, volunteer to work on a project. Start in a limited capacity, to make sure you're committed and to ease yourself into the group, looking for synergy among the group members and the absence of undue politics. When you feel comfortable, perhaps you can chair a committee or run for an office that will be particularly compatible with your area of expertise and will offer higher visibility for you.

In any case, don't forget to let people know the good you are doing. Your clients and employees should hear about your efforts and the organization or cause in which you have invested your time. (Who knows, maybe they'll want to join you. Or at least you'll foster goodwill because people like to like

people who help others).

Specifically, if you have a newsletter, include a brief spot on your charitable work. If the charity or organization has a newsletter, ask to be mentioned in there as well. Also, if you get appointed to a board of directors or chair a committee, don't forget to make sure a press release goes to the local papers. In this way, both you and the non-profit get more visibility. And, of course, don't forget to encourage the non-profit to get media coverage for key projects, by sending information to appropriate editors.

Beyond giving your time, which is inherently limited given a business person's schedule, there is another angle to giving. How about a few donations of product or service to create additional goodwill in other circles where you can't be so visible personally? It's okay if you can't serve on this year's auction committee, but how about giving something in-kind or something that can be sold at the auction itself?

Think of how many people will see your logo on the tickets for the event that say, "Design and printing courtesy of ABC Company." Or think of how many people will see your name on a gift certificate that is sitting on a silent auction table? And not only will all of these visual impressions increase your "share of mind" among the attendees (many of whom you hope are prospects, referral sources, or clients), but you'll create goodwill. Many of those people will feel good about doing business with you because you supported an organization about which they obviously care.

The bottom line to all of this is, of course, "the more you give, the more you get." It really is true!

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