

Members Quarterly

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Ask the Expert

Fundraising in the Workplace: How Much Can You Give?

Establish the right policy

Suzanne Nourse

Q: I may sound cheap, but I'm tired of all the donation requests at work. In the past year I've purchased wrapping paper, magazine subscriptions, chocolate bars and supported every charity and cause imaginable.

Am I really obligated to give each time? How do I say no without looking like the office grinch?

A: Most of us have our own list of charities that we support annually. Being constantly approached to support numerous charities and events can be stressful. These are worthy causes and many choose to support them. This should really be a personal choice, not an obligation or contribution out of fear of alienating colleagues.

Some organizations have reached their limit with employee solicitations and HR has initiated a policy forbidding all such requests. I think that this is a bit severe, but some feel this is justified because their employees have been overwhelmed with requests and made to feel uncomfortable if they decline.

My preferred method is for HR to promote a post-it-in-the-lunchroom or employee bulletin board only policy. That means that NO going from desk to desk asking to support any organization or charity. Employees see the notice on the board and give willingly without embarrassment, guilt or resentment.

If your employer is unwilling to support either of these policies, then you must deal directly with the request. A polite "No thank you" when you don't wish or are unable to give is sufficient. No other -explanation is required. I emphasize being friendly and polite – no eye rolling or "here we go again" sighs.

Many of us are solicited for donations by our neighbours, friends and family too. If you've already been approached for the same charity drive and have donated, you can just say so. Otherwise, the same polite "No thank you" should work. The people who know us can try to push all the buttons to get a donation, but it's not the tactic to use.

One of the advantages of raising funds for charity events now is the option of making your donation online without having your donation broadcasted. I was recently invited to an in-home high end jewellery sale with proceeds going to help fight cancer. What truly impressed me is that the hosts provided a link to the Cancer Society website as an alternative to attending the sale or feeling obligated to purchase an item on site. Even though I personally support the Cancer Society on my own, I still made an extra donation online on the host's personal page.

Don't feel guilty if you must refuse a co-worker's charitable request. You aren't the only one. We also need to keep these points in mind when canvassing for own beloved charities. Realistically, we can't donate to everyone and everything. In the meantime, put me down for two boxes of chocolate mint cookies.

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