

Passing the Hat: Raising Standards

By Farley Wheelwright

If you find it difficult to raise money in your capacity as a Facilitator of SMART Recovery® meetings, you are not alone; many feel the fundraising aspect of our job is “a necessary evil”. However, it is important to realize that it is only the **FEELING** that makes it evil.

Requesting and accepting donations does a lot more than supply ready cash to help keep the administrative gears grinding. While this **IS** a part of it, please do not confuse “passing the hat” as solely helping the National Office to “do their stuff”. It is true that it costs money to operate, pay our minimal staff, publish helpful training materials, and all the other annoying “nuts and bolts” that hold us all together. Without taking up a collection, these things could not happen. Even so, this is only one reason to raise money at our group meetings.

What else does passing the hat do other than making us feel like street panhandlers holding out a soggy coffee cup for quarters? For starters, it raises the consciousness of our meeting participants. We all know that the addictive person lives with excruciating low self-esteem. Would not you agree that if he or she can believe that their contribution to the cost of running this show helps make it all happen, it will give them a good feeling of pulling their weight? For it does, you know.

When we allow our group members to feel they are part of a larger movement, they will look upon their time together as far more than a treatment or a social hour. It is in fact more than a sharing of experiences. It is also a sharing of responsibilities. It gives participants awareness that we need them just as much as they need the group. Those who give just a little more than is comfortable will come away feeling they own the process, and the process needs them and vice versa.

As well as spending a couple of inspiring hours learning their ABCs and then giving back in return a token offering, those who give over and beyond a trivial cash donation (which will never be missed) will feel a sense of mission. Paying for the process is part of the process. This will not happen as long as Facilitators and group leaders are reluctant, embarrassed, or ashamed to ask for money. It is more than money we ask for; we ask for tangible group participation in the total picture.



Life beyond addiction

When we, as group leaders, can overcome the idea that asking for money is demeaning, we will be much better group leaders. Also, consider this: 25+ years ago, you could get a cup of coffee for a quarter; 40 years ago, it was a nickel. The same thing could be said for a glass of beer at the neighborhood saloon, if you dare bring that up! Today that cup of coffee is a dollar, a buck and a half... or more! So is that glass of beer.

When someone throws a buck into a cup, he or she is giving up no more than a cup of coffee. This does not put a very high premium on your time and mine. This does not make the group meeting seem very important, especially as they must pay \$7 - \$8 to go out and see a movie and \$15 - \$20 for a fancy meal. I do not need to be told that for some members, a dollar **IS** a generous gift. They know it and let them know you know it! However, do not be afraid to let those who drive up in BMWs, expensive SUVs and fancy pickups become aware that their dollar is not a fair share for the value they have received.

At the beginning of this article, I talked about raising money to defray our local, state, and national expenses. Be sure to let your group be aware of that. Do not be shy about letting them know some of the greater values beyond the almighty dollar, which they may think a reasonable amount. Do not bring this to their attention one evening and never mention it again. Keep them aware that we all have a responsibility to keep the group going and growing.

As a matter of principle, I never put a bowl on the table, pretend it is not there, and let the group file by as they leave and plunk in their dollar bills. At the end of each meeting, I ask what each participant has gotten out of the meeting. Then, I often suggest that five or ten dollars (from those who can afford) is a reasonable contribution to their sobriety, as well as to the welfare of the movement. I have never known this to discourage those who do not have the money to pay anything or those whose dollar **IS** a thoughtful sacrifice.

Does my system of talking money always work? Not by a long shot! But when it does, the money is sweet... and SMART Recovery benefits just as much as the people who give just a little more than they had planned when they first walked in the door.