



The Odd Couple: What Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Can Teach Us About Fundraising

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Strange Bedfellows? Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

Ahhh, Rosh Hashanah, the holiday of new beginnings, festive meals, and well-wishes from friends. And how about Yom Kippur? Who doesn't love fasting for 25 hours and fixating on all our wrongdoings and infringements from the past year?

These two are certainly an odd pairing. But they actually work well together.

Day-to-day life can wear us down – it can be monotonous, exhausting, and imperfect. Rosh Hashanah is a fresh start, a shot of optimism, a glimpse of inspiration.

However, after we've been uplifted, we need to get real. Yom Kippur is about cold, hard reality. On Yom Kippur, we have no choice but to pause our busy lives and do nothing but sit and reflect on the sometimes uncomfortable reality of who we are and what our shortcomings have been. Yom Kippur is about recognizing and acknowledging that we have room to improve. It is about accountability.

When we boil the High Holidays down to their very core, the magic words are inspiration (Rosh Hashanah) and accountability (Yom Kippur).

Interestingly, this combination is the essence of fundraising – make a case that moves people (inspiration), and then compel them to do something about it (accountability). The high holidays are about being inspired, but then taking specific steps to fulfill that moment of inspiration. In the spirit of the high holidays, let's take a few minutes to reflect on these factors at play in our work and how we can do better at both in the coming year.

Inspiration (Rosh Hashanah)

It's what drew us to this line of work in the first place. It's our job to inspire our donors so they give, partner with us, and feel great about it. All good nonprofit work should trace back to mission and vision, because that is the source of inspiration. Whether it's a strategic plan, a board training or a donor meeting, focusing on what the organization does (mission) and where it wants to go (vision) as the foundation for all work will motivate and generate buy-in.

How can we inspire our donors?

Capture Their Attention – This may seem obvious. However, multiple causes are vying for donor attention in today's digital age. How can your cause obtain their focus? While there are several slick digital tactics to accomplish this goal, the best tactics remain unique and personalized content and harnessing the power of your relationship. RAISE recently presented to a board of directors on how to make inroads with new prospects. The board members resolved to leverage their personal networks to share authentic, inspirational testimonials of impact that spoke to that donor's interests and concerns, person-to-person.

Keep It Fresh – In an annual campaign, it is easy to do the same things again and again, especially if they work! But look at each initiative and think about how you can make it better. Take, for example, the Shana Tova call to a donor. At RAISE, we coach nonprofit lay and professional leadership to take advantage of the “bonus points” of donor cultivation. A Rosh Hashanah call to a donor is so easy, it's like extra credit. The same goes for birthdays and the other major holidays. But how can a fundraiser make this exercise more enriching or inspiring? Can you use the opportunity to share

accomplishments from the past year and demonstrate the donor's role in achieving them? Can you invite the donor to experience more with a tour or meeting, without tying it to an ask?

Show, Don't Tell – Let recipients speak, provide hands-on volunteer opportunities, and share videos, pictures, and stories of your nonprofit's amazing work. Even for those loyal contributors already "in the know," knowledge and inspiration are two separate things, and everyone could use a recharge. Just like we celebrate Rosh Hashanah every year, returning donors need to be re-inspired each year as well.

Accountability (Yom Kippur)

Optimism is important in our line of work, but so is acknowledging reality. Most new years' resolutions fail; how do you ensure that yours do not?

Many people assume that inspiration alone builds an organization and that donations miraculously pour in. In reality, inspiration leads, but – in order to ensure that you engage people and sustain your mission – hard work follows. Once you have inspired your donors to care about your cause, you must then address accountability – whether your organization is seeking funds, fundraising partnership, or some other form of participation. Keeping your staff and lay leaders on track, setting and communicating clear expectations both within your organization and to your donors, and fulfilling your mission all require strong accountability. Fundraising is no different.

Accountability is about reflection and assessment. It includes but also extends beyond making good on the tasks we said we were going to do this week to advance our goals. It is about asking tough questions like:

Do we shy away from asking for new or increased gifts?

Are we doing our jobs or someone else's? Do we leave our offices to meet with donors, or do we busy ourselves with writing reports and newsletters?

Are our revenue streams diverse enough?

Are we headed down a sustainable path?

Let's allow the Jewish calendar and ritual to inspire not only our spiritual lives but also our work, which is critical to the core infrastructure of the Jewish community. Take this time to think strategically and critically about why we do what we do and, perhaps more importantly as it relates to our stakeholders, how we do it. This is a moment in time to reflect on our own inspiration, drive, and passion, as well as our relationships and tending to them. What will you do to ensure that you are inspired and proud of your accomplishments in one year's time?

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