Jeff and I were having dinner with a friend of ours earlier this week. We were talking about how so many leaders, managers, MGOs and PGOs buy into major and planned gift ideas, schemes, philosophies and approaches that are either not true or partially true but do not work.

I asked our friend why she thought people grab onto these ideas. She said: “It’s Pixie Dust. They really think it’s gonna work. And there’s a lot of pressure to get the money so Pixie Dust provides a path of least resistance. It’s easier to believe in Pixie Dust than it is to do the hard work we all know is required.”

Pixie Dust. Interesting label.

The dictionary states that pixie dust is “a substance or influence with an apparently magical effect that brings great success or luck.” So, it may sound like this: “people still seem to believe that X is the sure way to experience success in major and planned gifts because they, or the idea they have, have been sprinkled with pixie dust.”

After agreeing to what our friend said we sat there and made a list of major and planned gift pixie dust. Here are a few items that showed up on our list:

1. “All we need is a case statement or donor offer and we will be just fine.” No, that’s like saying that all you need is a product to sell, but you don’t need to associate that product with the demographics of a customer or market it or display it, etc. Pixie dust.

2. “85% of getting the gift is getting the appointment.” Huh? Really? And this one was stated by a very well known thought leader in major gifts. So, you just have to get the appointment and, bam, you are a nano second away from the gift? Nope, there is so much more to it than that. Getting the appointment is the least of it. The major thing is matching the donor’s interests and passions to a need your organization is addressing. That is magic. That is powerful. That has real value. Show up to a meeting with a donor without having addressed this one point and you will fail.

3. “Just do the wealth screening – find those people of wealth and all will be fine.” Yep, that’s it. This sounds like the statement Jeff and I, and our colleagues, hear all the time. And, it comes from an authority figure who has just met a high capacity person or has just come back from a Rotary meeting: “This guy just loves us. He has a ton of capacity. Go after him.” Yes, wealth screening is good. It adds a piece of info to your plan. But, that is a very small piece.
4. “Just hire some MGOs or PGOs and get out there.” Whoa. That’s gonna do it, huh? Nope. Who are they talking to? What are they presenting? Getting the talent in without setting up the system and structure for major and planned gifts is a waste of time and money. It will not work.

5. “Get that planned gift in and all is well.” No, if you don’t steward that planned giver there is a 1 in 2 chance they will change their mind and take your organization out of their will. So, it is not enough to just get the planned gift. You must stay with the donor. And that is hard work.

6. “Do a capital campaign.” You will not believe how many authority figures believe that tossing a capital campaign into play in their organization will save the day and propel the organization to new heights. Won’t happen. You have to have the donors. And you have to treat them right and start with their interests and what they want to do and then nurture them along with an intentional system and process.

7. “They (donors) just love what we do so all you have to do is ask.” Whew. It’s that easy, huh? Just get out there and ask and the donors will fall all over themselves giving you the money. Yep, that will do it. No, it won’t. Donors want value that is personal to them. And pulling that off takes a level of complexity and time to make happen.

Pixie Dust. You’ve heard them all, I know. And you may be suffering under the pressure to operationalize some pixie dust in your organization. But we both know that major and planned gifts is hard work that begins with qualifying your caseload donor then moves to identifying their passions, interests and communication preferences, then, once that is done, creating goals and plans that are personalized to that donor and working that plan.

There is a system and process you must have in place to do this. It is as far away from Pixie Dust as you can imagine. Which is what is frustrating to Jeff and me when we hear the random and regular dispensing of pixie dust that comes from thought leaders, bloggers and podcasters, speakers etc. It’s a sort of spewing out of nice sounding, magical concepts and words that, if you just adopt them, will make you successful.

Don’t buy into it. That advice is usually just one tiny part of the story – one building block of the major and planned gift house. You must build the entire house in order to be successful. And that is hard work that takes time.

Get rid of the Pixie Dust in your thoughts and life and get back to the real work that needs to be done. That is what will bring you success.
Veritus Group is a full-service mid and major gift consulting agency serving non-profits all over the world. Through the Veritus Group Academy, we strengthen development professionals and non-profit mid-level, major gift, and planned giving programs with a donor-centered philosophy that is focused on accountability.

You can reach us on the Web at www.veritusgroup.com.

Copyright © 2020 Veritus Group LLC