

Support Raising: I Don't Want to Raise Support!

By Steve Shadrach

I want to serve God and be obedient to his leading in my life, but I don't want to raise support!

If you have said or thought these words, you are not alone. In fact, most people living a donor-supported lifestyle will admit that at one time they probably had feelings much like this. Although this lifestyle is not a popular one in North America where independence is a high value, it is an essential part of working for many Christian ministries and mission agencies. For those who are surrendered to the will of God in their life, it is not a question of whether you will raise support but of whether you will be obedient. When that question is answered, support raising just becomes one aspect of the job that God is calling you to.

Although it is a huge obstacle to overcome, many people have come to see it as a blessing. Even though there are stresses and pressures involved in raising and maintaining a personal support team, I would not want to live any other way. The bonds that I have formed over the years with our supporters are priceless. The stories of God building my faith during difficult times could fill a book. And most of all, when I report to that ministry assignment, there is a sense of destiny and authority there. There are 50+ others that have paid a dear price to have me ministering there. I had better take it seriously and give it my all. That's what I call accountability!

You might be deciding the best way to fund your ministry. Should you be a tentmaker and work a job while ministering, or should you raise part or all of your personal support? Both are biblical, but if you are going to raise support you will probably have some doubts, fears, and questions. YOU ARE NORMAL! I still get the stomach butterflies each time I pick up that phone to make a support appointment. If you want to be successful, you are going to need some guidance. I have listed several resources in this brochure that would be good for you to purchase and study, but, just to hold you over until you can get to the bookstore, I have listed five keys to raising your personal support team. This is one of the most exciting adventures (i.e. roller coaster rides!) that I have ever experienced. So hold on tight; here we go.

The Five Keys to Raising Your Personal Support

1. Understand the Biblical Basis.

Take some time to study the Scriptures for yourself so you will know exactly what God thinks about asking others to give to you and to your ministry. Some choose to just pray and trust God to bring the funds in, as the great George Mueller did to support his orphanages in 19th century London. But it is just as biblical and requires as much or more faith to personally invite others to invest. Either way, we have to understand that God is the source of our funds, not the donors, our plans, or hard work.

Scott Morton of The Navigators in his excellent book *Funding Your Ministry Whether You're Gifted or Not* highlights five examples and teachings from the Old and New Testaments about the validity of God's ministers being supported by others:

- **The Example of the Levites.** The Jews gave their tithe to the priests for support (Numbers 18:24).

- **The Example of Jesus.** Many supported Jesus and the disciples (Luke 8:2-3).
- **The Teaching of Jesus.** A kingdom worker is worthy of support (Matthew 10:9-10).
- **The Example of Paul.** He stopped tentmaking to preach full-time while others covered his support (Acts 18:4-5).
- **The Teaching of Paul.** He had the right to be supported by the churches (1 Corinthians 9:1-18).

Once you have a biblical perspective on this topic of asking for and living on the support of others, evaluate one more thing. Evaluate your own giving! Before you can ask anyone else to give you have to be committed to sacrificially investing in kingdom work on a regular basis. Let's practice what we preach!

2. Kill the Giants in Your Own Mind.

Remember the twelve Hebrew spies who went into the Promised Land to take a look before the whole nation was to enter and claim what God had given them? Only Joshua and Caleb came back ready to invade. The other ten spies were so terrified of the giants they saw in the land that they confessed, "we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them" (Numbers 13:33). Instead of trusting God and moving out with courage, they let fear paralyze them. How they viewed themselves affected how the giants viewed them.

It is the same way in support raising. The confidence level that we have in our God, our vision, and ourselves can make us ... or break us! All of us have different "giants" in our own minds that will keep us from beginning and persevering in the process of assembling a full support team. These are some common "giants" we must conquer:

- You (or your parents or friends) might think support raising is really just begging.
- You might think you are not a worthy investment.
- You might think that support raising is just a "necessary evil" that must be endured.
- You might think that people are rejecting you or your ministry if they say "no."

You must kill these giants one at a time as you fill your mind with the Scriptures and believe what God had said about you and your calling. Then you can courageously march in and take the land! Just as God had prepared the land for the people to simply go in and take it, we need to believe that God has prepared the hearts of the donors, and we need to walk boldly in faith to find those givers and ask them to join us in our vision.

3. Pray and Plan

Author S.D. Gordon said it well, "Prayer is the real work of the ministry. Service is just gathering in the results of prayer." We need to bathe ourselves and our donors in prayer before, during and after this process. God will go before you. He will also build a love for your donors as you pray for them individually.

- **Create Your Budget!** Include everything you need for your personal needs, giving, saving, and ministry expenses. Seek to balance a lifestyle that will allow you to maximize your effectiveness with the group you are reaching but also be above reproach from your donors on the stewardship of your finances. If you happen to have school debt, simply include the required monthly amount owed and keep going. Your donors will admire you for keeping your promise to pay it back. Plan on and commit to raising 100% before you report to your assignment. Have a “when I raise my support” attitude, not an “if I raise my support.”
- **Namestorm!** Now that you have turned the whole process over to God you are ready to begin your planning. Write down every person that you have ever known during your lifetime. Don’t play Holy Spirit by saying, “Oh, that person would never give.” You will be surprised by some that will give and ... by some that don’t! Also, think of people that have a heart for student work, missions, or whatever group or area you are targeting. List churches, Sunday school classes, foundations, and corporations. The bulk of your support, though, will come from the individuals with whom you meet.
- **Map Out a Plan!** Divide up all the names according to the cities they live in. Then label each name “hot,” “cold,” or “medium” depending upon whether you think they probably will give, possibly will give, or probably won’t give. Next, pray and seek to attach an amount that you would like to ask them to give. Don’t use a one-size-fits-all plan; instead, base the amount on what you perceive they are able and willing to give along with the kind of relationship you have with them. You might feel more comfortable suggesting a range of giving rather than a specific amount. Either way, know that the tendency for most people is to ask for too little ... not too much. Remember, there is no cash-flow problem in heaven. Americans alone give more than 100 billion dollars to charity each year. God has instilled in every person a desire to give and you are helping them to invest in the eternal and thus build up their treasure in heaven. Go for it!

4. Ask Them Face-to-face for a Significant Gift.

This is the key. Jesus says “we have not because we ask not.” The word “ask” is used in the gospels 113 times. God wants to teach us about asking: him and others. I have looked at surveys as to why people give. The number one reason is always because someone asked them! It is not unspiritual or fleshly to ask. It is biblical, spiritual, and faith building to ask.

Let’s not hide behind our fears. Let’s walk toward them and render them powerless. The worst thing that they could say is, “No.”

If you just send a letter out or make a group presentation you might have a 10% response rate. If you send a letter and then call to ask you might get 25% of people to say yes. But, if you are willing to sit down eyeball to eyeball with others and lay out the incredible ministry vision God has called you to, usually well over half of the folks are pulling their checkbooks out! I’ve had some tell me they have never been turned down in an individual support raising appointment!

My research shows that ministries that train their staff to ask for the gift raise their full budget in less than half the time of groups that simply share the need, but don’t ask.

So, now that you are across the table from them, here goes: Take an interest in the life of your prospective donor.

5. Cultivate the Relationship.

Here are the ABC's for having a long and fruitful relationship with your supporters: Remember it's not fundraising, but "friend-raising." You can have an incredible ministry in their life. You might be their only connection to Jesus Christ or the great Commission.

- **Put Time into It.** Consider tithing your ministry time to your support team: prayer, writing, calling, ministering.
- **Thank Before You Bank.** When a new person or new gift comes in, thank them immediately.
- **Stay in Touch.** Regularly send them well-written newsletters. Share how their investments are paying off along with some specific prayer requests. Occasional postcards, phone calls, and visits are great, too. Beware: the main reason people drop off of support teams is that they do not hear from their missionary.
- **Win, Keep, Lift.** When you "win" a donor they are now on your team. Keep them on the team by caring for and cultivating them. Periodically, ask them to consider increasing their monthly or annual gift to you. Campus Crusade had a campaign where they were asking people to give 1 million dollars to their ministry. Almost 250 people said "yes"! Research showed, though, that the very first gift that each had made to this ministry years earlier had been on an average ... A mere \$10! Someone had taken the time to win, keep, and (over the years) to lift! People will stick with you for life if you will appreciate them and keep them informed. View them as vital partners in your ministry, and you will gain not only life-long supporters, but friends too! One day you will turn around and realize how blessed you have been and that you would not want to live any other way! Trust God and begin this exciting adventure today. You will never regret it!

Resources:

1. *Funding Your Ministry Whether You're Gifted or Not*, by Scott Morton, Dawson Media.
2. *People Raising: A Practical Guide to Raising Support*, by William P. Dillon, Moody Press.
3. *Getting Sent: A Relational Approach to Support Raising*, by Pete Sommer, Intervarsity Press.
4. *Friend Raising: Building a Missionary Support Team*, by Betty Barnett, YWAM Publishing.

Steve Shadrach is the founder of Student Mobilization. He and his wife, Carol, and their five children have enjoyed living and ministering on support since 1986. He takes great pleasure in training others how to raise their personal support, and conducts training events on the topic through a ministry he began called The BodyBuilders (www.bodybuilders.net).

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