



## **Fundraising Auction Secrets: Too Many Non-Profits Ask the Wrong Question First**

by  
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When searching for a Fundraising Auctioneer, the first question usually asked by most non-profit groups is the wrong question. The first question usually asked is "*Who will work as our Auctioneer for free*", when a better question would be "*What Auctioneer can help us raise more money for our cause than we did last year*".

A "*Volunteer Auctioneer*" is usually nothing more than an inexperienced bid caller who agrees to work for free. This person typically is popular and friendly with key players in the room but has little or no real Auction experience. They don't understand the Auction process, they don't know how to read the bidders in the room, and they don't understand how to move the Auction along quickly and efficiently. They simply stand at the podium and ask for bids from the crowd. And they are usually more interested in not embarrassing themselves instead of raising as much money as possible for the cause.

Most non-profit groups are willing to pay the facility, printer, caterer, liquor store, disk jockey, and florist...but they expect the Auctioneer... the only individual who will generate revenue for them... to work for free. And once the Volunteer Auctioneer is located, most groups congratulate themselves for saving a few hundred dollars. But in reality, this decision doesn't save them money...it costs them money. Because most groups fail to understand that the profit from a Fundraising Auction is made during the crucial *Pre-Planning Steps*, not on *Auction Day*.

Although it may sound cliché, it's true. "*You can't sell from an empty wagon*". And this is certainly true with Fundraising Auctions. An event can have a great cause, a beautiful location, and a large crowd, but if there is nothing interesting and valuable to sell at the Auction, the Auction won't raise much money.

Experienced Fundraising Auctioneers understand that there is a 3-step approach to raising money at a Fundraising Auction and each step is crucial to the financial success of the event.

***Step 1) Pre-Event Meeting:*** This is where the Auctioneer meets with the group at least 3-6 months prior to the event, and at this meeting the Auctioneer will:

- Explore the group's mission and the event's financial objectives.
- Explain to the group how the Auction process works, recognizing that most committee members have little or no real Auction experience and often need some guidance.
- Discuss how the Silent Auction should work.
- Discuss how the Live Auction should work, including timing, length, and the ideal number of items for sale.

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- Explain what items generally sell best at Fundraising Auctions....and what items to avoid.
- Explore the possibility of a Special Pledge Appeal....which will often raise more money than the Silent and Live Auction combined.
- Motivate the group and get them moving in the right direction, months before the event date.

Step 2) Pre-Event Consultations: Most groups will have many questions as the Auction date approaches. The Auctioneer should be available to offer guidance and answer such questions as:

- Is the group on target to reach their Auction financial objectives in terms of both quantity and value of the Auction items solicited to date?
- Which items should go in the Live Auction, and which should be relegated to the Silent Auction?
- What is the optimum order of sale?
- If conducting a Special Pledge Appeal, are all bases covered?
- Final tips, thoughts, and ideas about such important topics as *Auction Staffing, Bidder #'s, Auction Listings, Registration & Checkout*, etc.

Step 3) Auction Day

- Show up and call the bids
- Coordinate the all-important Special Pledge Appeal
- Add a more professional image to the Auction.

Of all of the above services, the only one that the "Volunteer Auctioneer" provides is to "Show up and call the bids" on Auction Day. They offer none of the other services outlined under Step #1 Step #2, or Step #3. As a result, the decision to use a *Volunteer Auctioneer* will always cost the group money. It does not save them money.

So if you want to raise more money at your Fundraising Auction this year than you did in previous years, locate the best professional Auctioneer you can find, and avoid the temptation of using a "Volunteer Auctioneer". The results will amaze you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Ivankovich is a professional Fundraising Auctioneer whose two latest books are "Fundraising Auction Secrets" and "Jump Start Your Fundraising Auction". Michael is an active member of the Pennsylvania Auctioneers Association, has been a licensed and bonded Auctioneer since 1994, and specializes in Fundraising Auctions throughout the Bucks County, Montgomery County, Lehigh Valley, and Greater Philadelphia areas of Pennsylvania, as well as in New Jersey and Delaware. He has served as President of the *Lehigh Valley Society of Auctioneers*, has served on the *Pennsylvania Auctioneers Associations* Board of Directors, and has been named Pennsylvania's "Auctioneer of the Year" by fellow Auctioneers. Michael's Web Site is: [www.MichaelIvankovichFUNDRAISINGAUCTIONS.com](http://www.MichaelIvankovichFUNDRAISINGAUCTIONS.com), and questions can be directed to him at his Office (215)-345-6094, Cell (215)-264-4304, or via email at [info@michaelivankovich.com](mailto:info@michaelivankovich.com)

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