

# THE UN-COMFORT ZONE

With Robert Wilson



## The Magic of Commitment is No Mystery

“Who wants to be chairperson of the Fundraising Committee?” asked the President.

The room became very quiet, and as I glanced around the table, I saw a dozen perfect poker faces. No one wanted this responsibility. No one was going to commit.

After a moment the President continued, “This is our most important committee, without funding we cannot put on our program to teach leadership skills to high school students.”

It was my first year on the executive committee of the Georgia chapter of the Hugh O’Brian Youth Foundation (HOBY). I had no idea how they had previously raised the \$50,000 a year that was necessary to operate. As an advertising consultant, I’d helped raise millions of dollars for several national non-profits with direct mail advertising. So, I thought, “How hard can this be?”

I raised my hand and said, “I’ll do it.” A collective sigh issued from the group and several congratulated me on accepting such a big responsibility. I basked in the accolades and beamed an appreciative smile back to everyone.

It didn’t take but a few days before I was lamenting, “What the heck was I thinking?”

I learned that my predecessors had solicited most of the money in a handful of big donations from a small group of donors. Unfortunately, those donors were feeling tapped out, and were no longer willing to give. I couldn’t back out of the job -

I’d made a commitment! All I needed was a Plan B.

I quickly got on the phone and starting telling everyone I knew what I was trying to accomplish. Someone suggested that I apply for grants from the charitable foundations of large corporations. Three dozen applications later, I had nothing to show for my hours of work. I now needed a Plan C.

When I volunteered, I had a vague notion that I would simply raise all that money with a direct mail campaign. The campaigns I’d worked on in the past had mega-budgets in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and major advertising agencies involved. I had no budget and only five or six volunteers to help out. Even if I had a budget, I didn’t know to whom I should send my direct mail solicitations. I knew from experience that retirees are among the best donors, but purchasing a list of generous givers was expensive!

About that time a fellow in the concession business who I worked with when I was president of my neighborhood association, called me to see if I knew any groups that could operate a beer stand at an annual weekend-long outdoor rock concert. I said, “Do I ever!”

We raised \$10,000 in three days. We did such a good job, we were asked to come back every year. It was a big job that required more people than we had, so we recruited help from outside of the organization. That turned out to be easy because the people who volunteered got into the concert free for that day. Many of them had so much fun, they volunteered to help put on the youth leadership seminars for which HOBY is known. As an unexpected side benefit, it became our best vehicle for recruiting volunteers for the next several years.

I still had \$40,000 to raise. I learned from one old-timer that in years past, HOBY received donations from the Kiwanis clubs. I called a friend who was a member. He told me that HOBY was on the Kiwanis International approved list of charities. This was huge! It meant we already had a foot in the door. He then helped me acquire a mailing list of all the clubs in the state.

I now had what I needed for a direct mail campaign. I wrote to every club and asked them to sponsor one child from each high school in their area. I then set up a phone bank of volunteers to call the clubs and ask them directly for a donation. We raised

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more than we needed! Best of all, we now had two programs in place for raising funds year after year.

I have found over the years that when you commit to a project whether it is starting a business, a new relationship or learning a new skill, opportunities arise that you ordinarily would not have noticed.

William Hutchinson Murray, from his 1951 book entitled *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition* says it best, "Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself,

then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way."

I've always called this because when you combine your commitment - your powerful desire - to solve a problem or satisfy a particular need, your subconscious mind will work on it 24/7.

To understand how this works, think of the last time you were in the market for a new car. After shopping the market, you selected

a particular make and model. Up until that time you hardly ever noticed that car on the road, but now that you have committed to it - suddenly you see them everywhere! Opportunities present themselves in the same way.

Commitment has a way of creating its own motivation. Go for it - and see what comes your way!

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