

Jews are commanded by G-d to give money to charity, and like every mitzvah, it should be done with simchah. Even when we enjoy the feeling of giving, there are times that we just don't like being asked to give. The sometimes thankless task of asking falls on the shoulders of professionals called fundraisers. *Mishpacha's* contributing editor, Yisroel Besser, recently gathered a roundtable of some of the Jewish world's most prominent fundraisers, while *Mishpacha's* news editor, Binyamin Rose, interviewed others, alongside heads of charitable organizations, and even a savvy donor, to present this inside glimpse of this ever-challenging field

**Binyamin Rose**

If there is one common denominator voiced with virtual unanimity among the fundraisers I interviewed, it is that not one considered himself to be a "born fundraiser." In fact many confided in me that they only accepted the jobs with the organizations they work for on the condition that it would not call for any fundraising.

While more than 100 colleges and universities offer degrees in nonprofit management that include courses in fundraising, all of the men we spoke with learned the profession on-the-job, with help from seasoned mentors. They attribute their success to the fact that they believe in their cause with a passion — a feeling they have been able to convey to donors. Many of them moved into a fundraising capacity, despite their initial protestations, after having worked in other positions for the organization.

Chaim Fachler, the fundraiser for Mosdos Sanz and Laniado Hospital for twenty-five years, says some of his most valuable experience was gained as a supermarket manager on a secular moshav

# The Give and Take OF FUNDRAISING



From Left to Right: Rabbi Herschel Leiner, Yisroel Besser, Rabbi Mordechai Suchard, Rabbi Moshe Aron Hoffman, Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz

photos: Menachem Kozlovsky

## MISHPACHA'S FUNDRAISING ROUNDTABLE

**Yisroel Besser**

While never a job for the faint of heart, in the current economic climate, fundraisers and administrators have been forced to become even more creative and resourceful.

To get a better understanding of the challenges, questions, and motivations, *Mishpacha's* Yisroel Besser assembled a small group representative of the best and brightest fundraisers and fundraising consultants. The group included: Rabbi Herschel Leiner, president of H. Leiner & Co., Corporate and Nonprofit Solutions in New York; Rabbi Mordechai Suchard, leader of the Gateways kiruv organization, and a pioneer in the effort to bring back unaffiliated Jews from the brink of assimilation; Rabbi Moshe Aron Hoffman, a fundraiser for the Williamsburg *mosdos* of the Satmar Rebbe, Rav Aharon Teitelbaum, *shlita*; and Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, who heads the effort to rebuild the Chabad institutions in Mumbai, India, which were so tragically destroyed a year ago by terrorists. Among this very dynamic group, we find a full range of experiences and viewpoints. Yisroel Besser opened the discussion with a question that had been discussed at a recent seminar specifically geared to fundraisers, led by Rabbi Leiner, along with Yitzchok Saftlas of Bottom Line Marketing Group.

**What would each of you see as the key to successful fundraising?**

**Rabbi Leiner:** "I think the foundation of fundraising is communication. It's not just soliciting. It's making the case for the institution and putting its best foot forward.

Another is relationships. Your concern for him impacts the relationship, as does your ability to recognize and appreciate the success he's attained in his professional life."

**Rabbi Hoffman:** "Go to people who love your cause; regardless of what you do, there will be many such people. Even if they have less money, their heart is with you and they will do extraordinary things."

**Rabbi Suchard:** "Remember, the donor really wants to please you. Allow him to feel good about his donation. Never leave a donor with a negative feeling, with a sense that you wanted more than he gave, with a feeling that you are disappointed. In addition to being unfair, it's also not smart."

**Rabbi Berkowitz:** "Thank your donors for what they did for you, and tell them how their contribution helped. This way, you are in a sense already soliciting them for next year, and they will know how much you need and why."

**What happens, however, when a donor tries to influence the process? What do you do with a wealthy donor who "throws his weight around," advising on whom to hire, which contractor to use, and the like?**

**Rabbi Suchard:** "You have to understand that a layman, to whom the organization is the apple of his eye, who gives his time, energy, and resources to it, will feel a certain sense of pride and ownership. His opinion should be respected and considered as long as it doesn't impede the running of the organization. You have to remember that you are also not the boss; Hashem is, and to do something wrong is not an option, whatever the seeming cost!"

following his move to Israel from London, where he ran a kosher meat and grocery business. "When people ask me where I did my course in public relations, I tell them it was in the supermarket," says Mr. Fachler, who started in Laniado's public relations department and eventually set up the hospital's fundraising infrastructure in five different countries. "In those days on the moshav, they had no notion of anyone religious, and certainly not a chareidi like me with my tzitzis flying out. Moshavniks are not easy to sell to, but I got out unscathed." Mr. Fachler himself may be too humble to say the following, but the fact that Laniado Hospital is the premier medical facility that it is today can be more than partially attributed to his fundraising prowess.

Boruch Rabinowitz, who today is executive director of Aish (HaTorah) International, started his career as an educator at Aish Toronto in 1981, at a time when the global economy was pretty much at rock bottom, like it has been for the past year. "There was a recession, and interest rates were 21 percent. One of our supporters called from Toronto and said ours would be

a suicide mission because of the recession. I turned to my colleague and asked, ‘What’s a recession?’” said Mr. Rabinowitz.

**Gentle and Comforting** It was an innocent question at the time, but almost thirty years later, Mr. Rabinowitz has the answer that the economists of the world should probably take note of: “The challenge is not to believe in the economy, but to believe in the Ribono shel Olam and that He’s the boss. The economy is a decoy.” Mr. Rabinowitz was personally responsible for raising substantial sums for the Aish HaTorah building in the heart of Jerusalem’s Old City that overlooks 40 percent of the frontage facing the Kosel and Har HaBayis. Today, he is responsible for Aish Jerusalem as well as other international projects.

The fact that the Jewish world has fundraisers — and successful ones at that — means there is enough money flowing to charitable organizations to ensure that our children have yeshivos to attend; our sick and elderly have facilities offering the special care they require; and that we have comfortably heated and air-conditioned synagogues to pray in three times a day. Without fundraisers and fundraising — and the charitable donations of the generous Jewish nation — we simply wouldn’t be a nation.

In fact, the first fundraising drive ever in the history of the Jewish People was led by none other than our first spiritual leader — Moshe Rabbeinu. “Imagine for a moment,” says Rabbi Herschel Leiner, president of H. Leiner & Co., Corporate and Nonprofit Solutions in New York. “The best fundraising project that someone could possibly have taken on would have been to raise money for the Mishkan. You would think that all he would have needed to do would be to give a knock on the *bimah* and the money would come pouring in, but that’s not how it happened. The Baal HaTurim explains that Moshe Rabbeinu was asked to address the people in a gentle and comforting tone when approaching the people for donations. It proves that a fundraiser needs to know how to speak and to represent what he’s doing.”

**The Donor’s View** Richard Levine, a retired attorney who now lives in the Midwest, would concur that hitting the right tone is paramount. “The biggest check I ever wrote to charity was when I got a call from Rav Noach Weinberg of Aish HaTorah and he said he needed a propane gas bill paid. It was a small bill and what I gave him was much more than he needed, but what impressed me was the straightforwardness of it all — I’m desperate, I need it now, and can you help me out?”

Chaim Fachler of Mosdos Sanz admits



“I think the foundation of fundraising is communication. It’s not just soliciting. It’s making the case for the institution and putting its best foot forward”

— Rabbi Leiner

**Rabbi Berkowitz:** “As we cultivate a donor, it is important that they are inspired and drawn to our mission; but we would never allow a donor who is not *frum* to influence a decision that would compromise halachah or our standards. At the same time, whatever professional expertise he can provide, from his vantage point, should be considered very seriously. The more involved they are in ongoing development of the projects, the more committed they are to the cause.”

**Rabbi Hoffman** points out that sometimes, the ideas of donors are the very best: “If someone is giving you his money, it is likely that he cares about your *mossad*. His suggestions might be very good ones!”

**Rabbi Leiner:** “Oftentimes, the donor isn’t trying to be forceful; it’s just that these are people who run their own businesses with a constant eye on increasing productivity, so they are trying to give you the benefit of their experience. Sometimes they have very good advice and can be a great help. It’s important to know how to deal with them, to be respectful even without giving in to unreasonable demands.”

“You have to remember that you are also not the boss; Hashem is, and to do something wrong is not an option, whatever the seeming cost!”

— Rabbi Suchard



**Rabbi Suchard:** “Though the advice of professionals and businessmen can prove more than helpful, it is extremely important that the donors have a positive feeling for the *mossad*. You don’t want to keep calling them up with your problems and create donor fatigue. You can lose a donor with too many negative reports. Only run to them when advice is necessary and they will appreciate it. One needs to be careful not to bombard them with every petty issue that arises.”

**Rabbi Leiner** has one more suggestion. “Businesspeople also tend to respect facts. Once, I was putting up a yeshiva campus and a donor was pushing us to include a *simchah* hall. For various reasons, we didn’t believe that it was a good idea, but instead of responding negatively, we prepared a study and statistics showing that *simchah* halls tend to work best in elementary schools, where the schedule allows for events at night; not in a yeshiva where boys have night *seeder*. He respected the facts and withdrew his request.”

**What are your feelings about taking donations from nonreligious Jews?**

**Rabbi Hoffman:** “Our view is that, for pure education, we need untainted pure money. If someone is not *shomer Shabbos*, as much as we recognize that he is a Yid, we aren’t interested in taking his money. Last year, there was a very generous government grant available for schools to upgrade their technology and purchase new computers, which would be placed in every classroom and would have Internet access. We saw it as a great opportunity, but our *rebbe* said no: ‘All day, we are teaching the children about the dangers of the Internet, so how can we, at the same time, accept this money and use it for our children’s growth? Isn’t that a double standard?’”

**Rabbi Berkowitz:** “We see it as no different than any other mitzvah. Just like we reach out to secular Jews with a pair of tefillin or a *lulav*, we will ask them for money for *tzedakah*. We believe that it’s a way for their home to grow as well, and I can personally tell you how every one of our donors has grown in their Yiddishkeit. I am living proof. My own parents were brought back to Yiddishkeit because of people who were open to



“Just like we reach out to secular Jews with a pair of tefillin or *lulav*, we will ask them for money for *tzedakah*. We believe that it’s a way for their home to grow as well”

— Rabbi Berkowitz

welcoming the secular Jew, and now they have beautiful children and *eineklich*; I could never pass up an opportunity to connect with any Jew.”

**Rabbi Suchard:** “Both views can be correct. Satmar wants *chinuch al taharas hakodesh* in their schools, and that makes sense, to teach Torah and *yiras Shamayim* with pure money. But we are doing kiruv! We are asking secular Jews to give money so that their own grandchildren will be Jewish. We are asking them to invest in themselves.”

There is a light moment in the room when Rabbi Berkowitz turns to Rabbi Hoffman. “I met a Yid on an airplane who grew up in Satmar. He is no longer religious, but he has warm feelings for Satmar. Would you take his money?” Rabbi Hoffman doesn’t miss a beat. “Listen, you bring him back to Yiddishkeit, and then I’ll go to him for a donation, and we’ll split it fifty-fifty.” ■

“Go to people who love your cause, and regardless of what you do, there will be many such people. Even if they have less money, their heart is with you and they will do extraordinary things”

— Rabbi Hoffman



that sometimes the lesson one learns from a donor is more valuable than the amount they write on the check. A certain husband and wife, who were not observant, would nevertheless give a great deal of money to Laniado Hospital and the Kiryat Sanz schools. When Shimon Peres was concluding a short stint as Israel’s prime minister, hospital officials wanted to present him with an award, and thought that this couple would be the ideal candidates to present it to him. They asked Mr. Fachler to sound out the donors to see if they would agree.

“I was so excited about this, when I met with them, I just blurted it out. They said to me, ‘Chaim, sit down,’ so I sat down. Then the husband said to me, ‘Chaim, politicians come and go. It’s the donors you need. Politicians give a token of appreciation to a donor and not vice versa.’”

“And that was a very, very important lesson for me,” adds Mr. Fachler. “Every now and then, to show your appreciation, you have to give to the donors and not vice versa.”

**Secular Money** Laniado Hospital is far from the only chareidi-run organization to benefit from donations from the secular Jewish or even the general public; but often, there is a layer of ice that needs to be broken. Malka Weinberg, manager of Ohel Sarah, dedicated to the care and development of some 200 special-needs children, has succeeded in raising grant money from at least four secular organizations. “There is sometimes a certain initial opposition when we say we are in Bnei Brak and we show them pictures of children with yarmulkes,” says Mrs. Weinberg, “but we show them how we deliver our services in a humanitarian and professional manner. It’s even a *kiddush Hashem* when the nonobservant see that our only goal is to improve the quality of life of the children and their families and that we are succeeding.”

Aleh is also run by chareidim, and has Israel’s largest network of residential facilities, serving 650 children with severe physical and cognitive disabilities. Most of its donations come from nonreligious Jews. “First, the organization has to prove that it is 100 percent reliable before I can ask a potential donor to give even five minutes of thought to my request,” says Yehuda Marmorstein, Aleh’s general manager. “I have to show that the facts and figures I give him are real and not virtual, and I have to be able to prove that we are observing all relevant government laws and procedures.”

The ability to demonstrate professionalism and a track record of success are all the more vital in today’s difficult economic environment, and the payoff can be huge. Rabbi Leiner contends that the clients he

represents have seen a 30 percent boost in their fundraising income this year and says it's not about what's going on the outside; it's about how well you run your institution.

"There is a silver lining to this cloud," he says. "We are going back to fundamentals. Institutions are now developing more donors, they are learning how to better service their donors, and most important of all, organizations are streamlining and revisiting their expenses."

**The Right Approach** How has the world of fundraising adapted since the onset of the global recession?

For Boruch Rabinowitz, who started with Aish HaTorah during the 1981 recession and is still holding forth in this 2009 recession, there are certain fundamentals that never change. "Hashem's got the Rolodex. He can provide any donor He wants. I make a list of options — cold calling, research, running campaigns, referrals — and then I weigh them out, seeing what makes the most sense. Then I put a plan together and do it."

In the face of this challenge, and the effort required to meet it, what keeps Mr. Rabinowitz going?



**"Every now and then, to show your appreciation, you have to give to the donors and not vice versa"**

— Chaim Fachler

"The Jewish People, Israel, and the world itself are in a crisis," he replies. "There is massive assimilation, massive intermarriage, and Eretz Yisrael is being threatened. When you look at it all, it's very dramatic; but people are just living life as usual. It is a challenge to wake people up; to keep myself attuned to the reality. We should all be in crisis mode right now."

Chaim Fachler contends that fundraising has not changed as markedly as most people may think during this recent recession. "Yes, people are more hesitant to part with money, as no one foresaw how their next-door neighbor was going to get hit, so the next person also doesn't know if he's going to get hit, and where that hit might come from. There is a cloud overhead, and that cloud won't go away until people start making more than they used to. But still, the money is there and people will give if you give them the choice."

Sometimes donors feel they are faced with a variety of choices and are approached by so many institutions, they just don't know

**"I tell people there are so many nonreligious people in the world, even if we had ten more organizations like Arachim there would be no competition"**

— Rabbi Chaim Morgenstern



who to give to, or how much to give. Rabbi Chaim Morgenstern, a part-time fundraiser with Arachim for the past eleven years, says that a fundraiser must always be prepared for what he calls "*mah nishtanah*," or why your organization is different.

"You're never supposed to knock another organization," says Rabbi Morgenstern. "You have to show them that what you're doing is different from what anybody else

no for an answer. "If you can't take no for an answer, don't go into fundraising," he says.

Sometimes, a fundraiser also has to be satisfied walking away from a donor with less than he was hoping for. While on Wall Street a broker is always trained to ask for a larger order, it doesn't work that way in Lakewood or Golders Green. "I don't press people for money. That's not my approach," says Rabbi Morgenstern. "Donors are happy when they realize you're happy with what they give you."

"For me, the joy and satisfaction I get," says Boruch Rabinowitz, "is that I wake up every morning, and I know I'm working for a cause and for Klal Yisrael, and trying to bring Hashem's children back. It's a *kiddush Hashem*, and I can tap into that on a daily basis. I know that if I make a call to someone, and he says no or hangs up, it doesn't really take away from my satisfaction. I know I did the right thing and it's all part of my *avodah* and *hishtadlus*."

While donors have the right to choose whom they give to and how much they give them, there is one thought that Rabbi Leiner suggests they always keep in mind. "Each day, when we wake up, we get a new gift from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and we have a responsibility to renew our commitment to give *tzedakah* every single day. There's no bigger *hakaras hatov* that we can give to HaKadosh Baruch Hu than to give generously and continuously." ■

**"The challenge is not to believe in the economy, but to believe in the Ribono shel Olam and that He's the boss. The economy is a decoy"**

— Boruch Rabinowitz

