

# 7 Words

## That Unlock Major Gifts

The sentence every fundraiser  
should try this week





## 7 Words That Unlock Major Gifts

The sentence every fundraiser should try this week

A powerful 7 word sentence you can use with a major donor is:

**“I’m wondering if you could help me.”**

After you say it, stop talking.

That’s it.

No pitch. No panic. No sales voice.

Just **a moment of silence** that invites the donor to step into something important.

And what usually happens next?

The donor leans in. They say something like:

“Of course—what do you need?”

If you’ve ever hesitated to start a conversation with a major donor, or you’re worried about sounding like a salesperson, this sentence is a low-pressure way to start a conversation.

---

### Why This 7 Word Sentence Works (Psychology Breakdown)

#### 1. It activates the Ben Franklin Effect

Asking for help makes people *like you more*.

This isn’t opinion—it’s historical psychology. When someone does something kind for you, their brain needs to justify the action. So, it concludes: *“I must like this person.”*

#### 2. It raises the donor’s status

By asking for help, you’re elevating the donor, not diminishing yourself. You’re showing trust, not weakness. You’re saying, *“You matter. Your input is meaningful.”*

### 3. It creates positive tension

These seven words open a loop in the donor's mind. Humans are wired to close open loops. It's the same reason cliffhangers work. That pause after the phrase? It makes them lean in:

"Help you with what?"

### 4. It triggers a micro-commitment

A tiny "yes" ("Sure, what do you need?") is the beginning of a bigger yes. It moves them from bystander to partner without pressure.

### 5. It's backed by behavioral research

Studies in behavioral psychology (including work by Dr. Robert Cialdini and others) show that when you phrase a request **as a request for help**, people are significantly more likely to say yes.

- Asking "Will you donate?" puts the focus on your need.
- Asking "Could you help?" puts the focus on **their generosity** and **their identity** as a helpful person.

And here's what's truly powerful for nonprofit professionals, especially those early in their career:

**Asking for help doesn't push people away. It pulls them in.**

It's not a burden. It's actually a way to build a bond with donors.

---

## Where to Use It

### In a major donor conversation:

Just say it. Then wait.

"I'm wondering if you could help me."

**[pause]**

When they say "With what?" respond simply:

“We’re trying to keep our youth shelter open through the winter—and I’d really value your perspective.”

In an email:

**Subject line:**

I’m wondering if you could help me.

**Opening line:**

I’m wondering if you could help me.

We’re facing a tough decision about expanding our impact or cutting back services...

In a printed letter:

I’m wondering if you could help me.

We’re at a turning point and I wanted to bring this to you first, before anyone else.

In a short video or donor thank-you:

Look directly at the camera. Then say:

“I’m wondering if you could help me.” **[Pause.]** “I want to make sure we never have to turn a family away and I think you’ll see why this matters...”

---

**Try This: 3-Day Micro-Test**

**Day 1** — Use the 7 words in a meeting.

**Day 2** — Send them in an email to 100 donors.

**Day 3** — Open a phone call or voicemail with it.

Ask yourself:

- Did they lean in?
- Did they ask what you meant?
- Did it feel like *connection*, not sales?

If yes, keep using it. Everywhere.

## Quick Gut Check Before You Use It:

- ☐ Am I genuinely asking for their help, not just a donation?
  - ☐ Will the silence feel respectful, not awkward?
  - ☐ Does this moment honor their time and position?
- 

Donors want to be part of something meaningful.

These 7 words do it all:

They open the door. They honor the donor. They make giving feel good.

**“I’m wondering if you could help me.”**

Say it. Pause. Listen.

That’s where generosity begins.

---

## Want More Phrases That Work?

This is just one of the tools we teach at the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference, where major gift fundraisers come to learn the exact words, sequences, and stories that move donors to act. Come write your next great donor moment with us:

<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>

**If you found this booklet helpful, please forward it to a friend who could also benefit from it.**

**Get help raising more money. Come to the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference. For more information, go to:**

<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>