

The Secrets To Hosting a Successful, Money Making, Fund- Raiser Garage Sale

Can an organization with fewer than 40 members host a fund-raising garage sale and make over \$5,000 in two days? You bet! It's been done at the Unity Church of Ames, IA five years in a row. Mary Sigmann, Professional Organizer and coordinator of these garage sales shares her secrets.

How can the same 38 people donate enough merchandise to support a charity fund raiser year after year? Simple - they understand the joys and benefits of decluttering, simplifying and releasing that which is no longer useful. Sigmann teaches in her audiotape and workbook, *Getting Organized Is a Breeze*, that "when we hold on to that which is no longer appropriate for our lives and spaces, we also hold on to negative energy that restricts our freedom, wastes our time, space, energy."

Here is how it's done.

FORM A COMMITTEE

Once motivated to clear out and clean up, the membership automatically has a vested interest in the success of the fundraising event. It is from that pool of committed souls that a team is formed. The duties assigned to the team members should be suited to each person's talents, abilities, and availability. From your group of volunteers will emerge a leader or coordinator, display merchandisers, pricers, sorters with an eye for quality, and cashiers. Encourage each person to do the job they want to do, and that they do best.

Other volunteers you might need are: able-bodied people who can do heavy lifting, someone comfortable with electronics and computers to make sure anything of this sort being sold is in good working order, a person with a truck or van to pick up and to haul away large loads, someone to write and place the newspaper ads, someone to print and distribute flyers and signs, and someone to arrange for rental of display tables and clothing racks. Needs vary with every organization and every sale.

CHOOSE A LOCATION

There are three primary choices: at the church or other organization's property or location, at a rented space or location, or on property owned by one of the organization's members. If you can have the sale at the organization's or a member's site, you save the cost of renting a space. The downside is that if your organization is small, you will most likely need to dismantle the current contents of the space to turn it into a sale site. If you have the sale in a rented space or on a member's property, you eliminate having to dismantle the church, but you are more limited in the time you have for setting up and arranging the sale.

If possible, hold an indoor sale. An outdoor sale makes you more vulnerable to cancellation due to weather. Consider all of these options before deciding on a venue for your fund raiser.

FIND STORAGE

It is best to have long or short-term storage so the work of preparing for the sale can be spread out over time. The Unity Church of Ames has a small year-round storage facility that contributes greatly to the success of the sale. Members can bring donations at any time of the year.

CONSIDER TIMING

Early spring and early fall are the two best times to hold a sale. In the spring, everyone is eager to get back out and enjoy the sales, in the fall, shoppers are thinking about shopping for

secondhand school clothes and for holiday decorations and gifts. The weather is most unpredictable during these times, but if your sale is indoors, you can hold and advertise your event as 'rain or shine.'

ADVERTISE

The better your event is advertised, the more successful it will be. Sigmann suggests advertising as heavily as your budget will allow. There are several options including flyers, newspaper classifieds, radio and even cable TV. Being a nonprofit organization can bring you some leverage here. If your location is not on a main street, you may need to post signs with directions or arrows to guide buyers to your site.

HAVE THE RIGHT MATERIALS ON HAND

You will need pricing labels and tags, safety pins to attach the price tags to clothing and accessories, plastic or paper bags for the shoppers' merchandise, reclosable clear plastic bags of various sizes for containerizing small items, pens for marking prices, scotch tape, rubber bands, a money box, and a cashier's table. Tables and clothing racks upon which to display the merchandise can be rented for the length of the sale, or purchased for use year after year.

PRICE IT RIGHT

The general rule is: price everything - even the smallest item. If you have lots of little toys or small household items, an option is to place them in medium size boxes labeled 'any item in box 25 cents'. Otherwise every item should be marked with a price tag or label. This helps the customers make decisions, prevents confusion, and saves the crew the Trouble of having to figure out a price on the spot. Sigmann recommends that there be nothing under a quarter. She says "If it's not worth a quarter, it isn't worth the space at your sale." Her golden rule for pricing is to ask yourself, "If I needed this, what would I be willing to pay for it?"

THE BIG DAY

Sigmann recommends a two-day sale. The serious buyers will show up during the first two hours of the sale. The rest of the day people will be in and out.

The second day is for re-merchandising what is left over from the first day. On the second day, do not put out new items. Instead, spread out and straighten the things you still have. Make the room look as attractive as it did before the sale began on the first day. Once the sale starts, the work is not over, you should be continually straightening, cleaning, and repositioning the merchandise. If something is not selling, move it to a new spot to change and shift the energy.

The Unity Church of Ames holds its annual sale on Friday 8am -6pm and Saturday 8am-2pm. At noon on Saturday, the leftover clothing and merchandise is sold at half-price. Another option is to start the sale on a Thursday evening and running through to Saturday noon.

Whatever you decide, make sure the sale is a fun-filled event - a celebration. Sigmann does not recommend combining a garage sale with other fund raisers like pancake breakfasts or bake sales. This distracts, confuses and frustrates the buyers and pushes the limits of your volunteers.

MERCHANDISING TIPS

1. Don't put out anything that you wouldn't own yourself. Be especially discerning regarding clothing; check for style and condition (wear, stains, and missing items like buttons and belts).
2. Don't hesitate to give the items that are not in quality condition to the Salvation Army or Goodwill, or throw them into the trash. This is a prosperity event so apply prosperity principles of abundance and generosity.

3. When putting merchandise out for the sale, display it nicely so every item can be seen. Avoid cluttered piles and stuff thrown haphazardly in boxes. This turns people off. Have as much as possible off the floor and either hung up or on a display table.

4. Watch for the point of 'critical mass'. There comes a point when putting out more stuff is counterproductive. If they can't see it, they won't buy it. If you have more merchandise than you can effectively display then discard some of the poorer quality items or save a few boxes as your 'seeds' for the next sale.

AFTER THE SALE IS OVER

Sigmann says, "When our sale is over our coffers are full and we still have lots of stuff to take to the Salvation Army, Women's Shelters, Homeless Shelters, Goodwill and other charities. The Unity of Ames annual garage sale is truly a prosperity demonstration. Just like the miracle of the loaves and fishes."

"We do not save leftover merchandise for next year's sale. We just give it away to a charitable organization. When you combine spiritual principles of prosperity with the principles of good business, you're assured of success."

Mary Sigmann is a professional organizer, coach and speaker. For more information see www.organizer-coach.com. Contact Mary by e-mail at harmonypro@organizer-coach.com.

For more information on getting organized, decluttering or conducting a fundraiser garage sale, contact Mary Sigmann at 515-233-5191 or check out her website at www.organizer-coach.com.

Mary Sigmann is a Professional Organizer and Success Coach. A member of the National Association of Professional Organizers and the International Coach Federation, Ms. Sigmann is the author of the audiotape and workbook, *Getting Organized Is a Breeze*. A graduate of Ohio State University and Coach University, she facilitates workshops and seminars nationwide.