Stewardship Coach Playbook Series

Before Your Next Campaign

What You Need to Know and Do Before Your Capital Campaign Begins

Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach

Before Your Next Campaign: What You Need to Know and Do Before Your Capital Campaign Begins

A Stewardship Coach Playbook

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The Formula for a Successful Capital Campaign

In my decades of helping churches hold capital campaigns, I have found that the majority of mistakes happen BEFORE the campaign even starts. This playbook aims to help you avoid these mistakes by showing you what you need to know and do BEFORE your next campaign. You are thinking of a campaign, right? I mean, you wouldn't be reading this unless you were. Great! You have come to the right place. I have worked with churches with $100,000 yearly budgets and with many of the top 100 churches with multi-million-dollar budgets. The principles I use with the Super Mega church are the same ones that I use with the $100K church. With this playbook, you get the value of all this experience and knowledge. So, let's get started by understanding the formula.

The winning formula for a successful campaign is: Information + Inspiration + Time = Success. If you want to raise maximum dollars, you need to adhere to this formula. Let me break this down. “People are down on what they are not up on.” A consultant I worked with in the beginning days of the stewardship ministry used to say that to clients. It is true, particularly when it comes to people making gifts larger than they are used to.

So, if you want to raise the most dollars, you need to over-communicate. Inform, inform, and then inform! Whatever you are asking your donors to support must make sense to them. Do you have a plan to carry to completion what you are asking them to give to? To gain the dollars you need, you have to fully inform your donors of the what, when, why, and where of your campaign. Touch the heart to reach the pockets of your donors. Donors need to be inspired to give. Your vision must be clear, concise, but most of all compelling. I will have more on this later. For now, be aware that if the heart is not impacted, the gift will be small.

Here is a truth you MUST embrace! The more compelling the vision is, the more significant the gift will be. To inspire your donors, you must communicate the vision of the “ask” in such a way that their hearts are moved. Spiritually driven campaigns inspire donors more than anything. You are really not raising funds as much as you are raising faith. What separates a non-profit campaign from a church campaign? It should be our spiritual focus. You are asking people to get in on what God is doing. Bathe your campaign in prayer, and donors will be more likely to give with faith-driven commitments.

Finally, give donors the time to take the journey. You cannot rush the process and still see success. One of the most frustrating things for pastors and staff is how long it sometimes takes our members to get on board with what we are proposing. Yet if you hurry the process, you risk the results. The bigger the “ask,” the more time your donors will need to wrap their heads around what you are asking them to do. The more time you give your campaign, the more likely you are to raise what you want and need. So, remember, successful capital campaigns are not something you go lightly into. If you want to raise dollars, remember the formula: Information + Inspiration + Time = Success.

How You Start Determines Where You Will End

In capital campaigns, how you start determines where you will end up. My mentor, Dave Sutherland, used to say, “You never have to recover from a good start.” If the foundation you lay at the start is wrong, the results at the end could be disastrous. Many a race is won or lost by how a runner gets out of the blocks. The same is true for churches entering into a capital campaign.

Common Starting Block Mistakes

Here are some of the most common mistakes churches make as they get out of the blocks. The first is having unrealistic expectations of how much they can raise. This is perhaps the biggest mistake churches make. They overestimate what their giving potential is. This often leads them to plan for a larger project than they can afford, which exacerbates their problems, thus creating more potential for failure.

Assuming everyone is on board. You need to know beforehand what objections your people might have with regard to your project. Knowing potential landmines helps you craft a message to meet their questions. Again, my mentor Dave Sutherland used to say, “A question anticipated is an opportunity.”

This is one reason we do Feasibility Studies well before the start of the campaign. Not everyone sees the vision of your project as you do. It is one thing to vote for a project but another thing to put my money into that project. You have to know ahead of time what questions are in the minds of your donors BEFORE you start the campaign.

Thinking it will be easier than it is. Let me be frank: a lot of the campaign process is easy. As I always say, “How hard is it to put together a prayer team?” A campaign, however, rests upon a solid foundation, and laying that foundation correctly is often complex and difficult. Going it alone typically means problems later on that could drastically impact your results. A seasoned, experienced partner CAN make it easier for you than if you do it yourself. Remember, it is never as easy as you think!

Believing lenders will loan more than they will. Banks do lend to churches, but they are cautious about who they loan to and in what amounts. If your project is bigger than you can find financing for, you run the risk of imploding your campaign and your project before you get started. A good consultant can help you navigate through this landmine.

Not giving enough time to the process. We advise at least six months on average. I have more on this later in this playbook. However, it is important to realize that the more complex the project, like relocations, the more time will be needed. Again, a good consultant can help you with the timing of your campaign.

Are you set for a good start? It is never too early to begin the planning process for your next campaign. We can help you now, getting you out of the blocks towards the finish line. It is always harder to catch up than to stay ahead.

It's All About the Vision

When it comes to raising funds, the one thing you need to know is that it's all about the vision! Nothing else is as important as helping people see what you see: the vision God gave you for your church. How much you will raise depends to a great degree on your vision. Your vision should be clear, concise, and compelling.

Clear – Does it make sense? Can a member tell another person what the vision of the church is in less than three minutes? Not only must the vision of the church be clear, but the vision of the project, or why you are raising funds, needs to be clear as well. The clearer the vision, the more likely donors will give to support it.

Concise – Too many vision statements are way too long. The attention span of most people is very limited, especially when it comes to communication from their church. So, work hard to boil down what the "ask" is about in a way that makes sense but can also be read quickly. The more concise your vision, the more likely donors will even read it!

Compelling – Does your vision touch my heart and thus cause me to want to give to support that vision? If you cannot make your message compelling, don't expect donors to support it. The more compelling the vision, the more money will be given.

Do you know how to craft a vision statement that accomplishes all of the above? One of our specialties is doing exactly that. A good vision statement that is well thought out and well written is the base upon which the rest of the campaign is built. No matter how many teams you have or how many people are working in your campaign, if the vision is not right, the funds will not follow. So take care that your vision is well crafted.

One final word of advice: be careful what you communicate, and when. Most campaigns that fail do so far in advance of the start of the actual pledging cycle. It starts with a poorly crafted vision statement. Poorly communicating how the vision will unfold also hinders results.

Too often church leaders overpromise and then underdeliver. Make sure your vision is a realistic faith venture, not a leap into the dark. A fine line separates faith from folly. Overpromising in your vision statement will lead you to problems later on.

Sharing too much information too soon can derail a project. Projects are fluid and change almost on a dime. You have to make sure you have all your ducks lined up properly. Failing to do so will make raising funds that much more difficult.

There are a lot of complexities that go into a well-crafted vision statement. When you need a home-run success in your capital campaign to support your vision, it is essential to get the vision right! Make sure your vision is clear, concise, and most of all, compelling.

Before You Can Start, You Have to Get It Out of Committee!

Don't let a committee kill your dream of expanding your ministry! I cannot tell you the number of times I have talked to a pastor with a dream of expanding his ministry only to have a committee kill that dream with questions, hesitations, and roadblocks. Committees are designed to enhance ministry, not kill it. Yet the old ministry joke is that if you want something killed, give it to a committee.

Why is it that smart business people who take risks all day long in their business fail to see a step of faith as just that, a step of faith? I see this all the time: smart people are put onto committees, and then they seemingly check their brains at the door when it comes time to make a decision for their church. They get overly cautious and often miss the window of opportunity that God has placed in their path.

I doubt there is a pastor or church staff member reading this now who is not saying, Amen! However, the reality for many is that you have to work with committees. Committees can be frustrating, but they can also be a great aid to us in our ministries. Properly used, committees can also help move the rest of the congregation to accept whatever proposal is being presented. For many of you, working with committees is not an option. If you are in that camp, here are some recommendations on how to work with a committee if you are thinking about a project and campaign to support it.

Here are my suggestions for working successfully with building committees. They are based not only on my years as a Senior Pastor but on decades of working with churches and their various committees across America.

- Start sooner! You just have to accept that it will take your committee longer to get up to speed on what you are proposing. Committees need time to process things, so give them the time they need.
- Meet ahead of time with the key players. Whether it is the chairperson or another key player, meeting ahead of time with them will help get them in your corner. The success of any meeting is the meeting before the meeting!
- Give them all the information needed. Prayerfully, your committee is made up of mature Christians who can handle all the various aspects of your project. Don't sugarcoat the plans or hold any information back.
- Give them the time they need. While it might be frustrating, you simply have to accept that it will take them time to process the information.
- Call them to prayer. The church is a spiritual institution, and our process should be spiritual as well. Make sure your committee not only looks at the facts but also sees the project with the eyes of faith. That can only happen through prayer.

Set a deadline for a decision. Church committees are like a cow chewing her cud. If you let them, they will talk and talk and talk. Talking is not deciding. Lead them to a point of decision by putting a timeline upon the decision-making process.

While the above might not settle every issue you face with committees, it could help pave the way for your next decision. For many pastors and church leaders, working with committees is a mandate we cannot ignore. You have no choice in the matter. You do, however, have a choice in how you work with

those committees. Using the above points will help you have a committee that works with you, not against you. Let's see committees as the enhancers of a dream, not the killers of a dream!

How Long Does It Take to Hold a Capital Campaign?

The answer to how long it takes is always, “it depends,” but for most campaigns the average time is at least six months from initial planning to completion. In some situations it can and must be done sooner, but those are the exception rather than the rule. Those campaigns typically never raise the same levels of money as those that give more time to the process. Here is one of the driving mantras I preach to my clients: it's more important to get the campaign done right than it is to get it done on some arbitrary timeline.

The question is one of timing, not time. You can help assure that your next campaign is successful by taking the steps in this playbook. My goal is to get you to the starting line of your next campaign with the right timing for whatever time of year your campaign is held.

The Six Month Rule of Thumb is what I like and advise for my clients. Give yourself AT LEAST six months. However, at times, because the timing is not right, it takes more time. To help you get a sense of the typical times campaigns are held, here is an overall timeline to consider.

When I say six months, I mean from planning to commitment weekend. I am not talking about how many weeks or months it might take you to select a campaign partner. That's another key point that I will talk about later. For now, let's focus on the various timelines most used by churches.

Spring or fall? Campaign timelines fall broadly into spring and fall time frames. Is one better than the other? In my experience, they typically are not. Again, success is dependent upon timing, not time. What drives the timeline is also your church's timeline. For instance, if the pastor is going on a safari this spring, you probably don't want to hold a capital campaign then. Trust me, I speak from experience!

To determine when the best time is for your next campaign, take a look at your calendar. Capital campaigns don't totally stop all church activities. Yet pastoral absence, pre-set events, various holidays, etc., all weigh into your calendar planning. Basically, in the spring there are two windows of opportunity, and in the fall there is one.

Pre-Easter Campaign – With this timeline, you would want your commitment weekend to be ideally two weeks before Easter. So, pick out that weekend and back up six months.

Memorial Day or before school dismisses – Here you want commitment weekend to be about two weeks before school gets out. In most states, this is around Memorial Day. In others, school gets out somewhere around the second week of June. Find that date and back up six months.

Fall campaigns – There is really only one timeline for fall. You must have your commitment weekend no later than the weekend before Thanksgiving. Once again, find that date and back up from there six months.

In each of the above timelines, there is leeway. Yet for our purposes, this broad overview will help you in your planning AND give you the needed time to get your next campaign done right! One of the biggest mistakes churches make is not giving themselves enough time to adequately plan, thus potentially endangering their chances for success.

The Eight Common Mistakes Churches Make

1. Not starting soon enough. There are eight mistakes that we find most common, and this is mistake number one. Churches don't realize how long it takes to do a great capital stewardship campaign. As I have stated, if given my choice, I would like at least six months from start to finish. Some campaigns take longer. A few can be done in a shorter time frame. The rule here is to start sooner rather than later. The sooner you start, the more options you have. When you start later in the game, you are more prone to hurry the process and thus make mistakes. Mistakes mean, at the least, a loss of money. Sometimes it can mean worse. Get started now!

2. Single-focused vs. Multi-focused. Most campaigns are driven by preachers. We tend to approach all aspects of planning like we do sermons. We never think about point number two until we have completed point number one. So, when we come to the campaign, we put it off until we think we have all the other pieces in place.

You have to have your focus on three areas: the project, financing for the project, and funding, or raising money to pay for the financing. All three have timelines. The smart church realizes that they have to focus on all three at the same time. Don't be sequential in your planning!

3. Premature launch. This might seem a contradiction from my first point, but what I mean here is the public phase of the campaign. Too often, in our excitement, we share things about the project or campaign that are not yet fully developed. Again, most mistakes in a campaign are made months before the campaign begins.

Church members have memories like elephants when it serves their purpose. They will remember things you said months ago. Be careful what you communicate, as plans have a way of changing. A premature launch can get people focused on the wrong thing at the wrong time. Wait for the public launch when all your ducks are properly lined up.

4. The Lone Ranger mentality. Another way of stating this is Do It Yourself. Churches that go it alone raise far less than those that have a partner. It is much harder than you realize. For one thing, no one trained you in seminary or Bible College in the realm of stewardship. Stewardship firms, however, are experts in the field. Don't succumb to the tendency of many preachers to never ask for help. Going it alone will mean failure.

5. Going cheap. One reason why so many attempt to do their own campaign is the fee of the stewardship firm. When you go cheap, you get cheap. Incidentally, if you go with the cheapest stewardship firm, you might find that you also get what you pay for. I know a church that decided to run their second campaign by themselves to save on the fee. They raised far less than they did in their first campaign. I call that poor stewardship.

6. Funding fantasies. We think we can raise three to four times our annual operating budget. Really? Does Bill Gates go to your church? That kind of ratio is ALWAYS driven by significant gifts. Don't believe the hype of my industry about pledge-to-budget ratios. Few companies tell you the truth. Honestly, over time, pledge-to-budget ratios for ALL campaigns of ALL stewardship firms have trended lower. Don't

think you are any different from other churches. Funds can be raised, but you should be careful about unrealistic expectations.

7. A design that does not fit. Make sure what you are building not only fits who you are but fits what you need. Does your builder understand what your needs are? A good builder will begin not by asking what you want, but what you want to do with what you want. There is a huge difference. Buildings are simply boxes in which ministry takes place. Make sure your design fits your ministry focus.

8. A vision that does not inspire. Good vision trumps everything, even a bad economy! People do not give to brick and mortar; they give to vision. Make sure that your vision for the project inspires your donors to want to sacrifice to see it happen. If your vision doesn't inspire, they will simply spend that money eating out, buying another phone upgrade, or simply hiding it under their mattress. It's a vision thing!

There you have it. Eight of the most common mistakes that churches make. Make sure you don't make these mistakes. Making these mistakes will not mean the project won't happen. However, if you make these mistakes, it might delay the process or cause you to raise significantly less than what you could have.

One way to avoid them is to have a good stewardship partner early on in the process. Why are you waiting to secure that help? I can help you avoid these mistakes and get your next campaign out of the blocks strong. I unpack these principles further in my book, The Fully Funded Church Is Not an Accident. To start the conversation about your next campaign, contact me at mark@markwbrooks.com.

About the Author

Mark Brooks, The Stewardship Coach, has spent decades helping churches of every size build a culture of generosity, from congregations with $100,000 budgets to some of the largest churches in America. He is the author of The Fully Funded Church Is Not an Accident, and he coaches pastors and church leaders on capital campaigns, seasonal giving, and year-round stewardship.

To bring Mark's coaching to your church, contact him at mark@markwbrooks.com.

Also by Mark Brooks
The Fully Funded Church Is Not an Accident

If this playbook helped you, the full story is waiting for you. In The Fully Funded Church Is Not an Accident, I bring together what I have learned over decades of walking alongside pastors and church leaders, showing how generosity grows when vision is clear, communication is consistent, and giving is treated as discipleship rather than a necessary interruption in worship.

It is written for the pastor who is tired of hoping the money will come in and is ready to lead with a plan. You will find the principles behind every playbook in this series, woven together into a year-round approach that helps your church stop surviving and start being fully funded for the mission God has given you.

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