

Transcript – Episode 83 – [The Major Gifts Playbook with Doug Barker](#)

Dolph Goldenburg: Welcome to the Successful Nonprofits™ Podcast. I'm your host Dolph Goldenburg, bringing you a conversation on the *Major Gifts Playbook* with Doug Barker. When we talk about major gift fundraising, we often think about that one-on-one relationship between the major gifts officer and the prospect, and we often think that that person just has sort of miraculous interpersonal skills, that everybody loves them, and that they're just great at asking people for money and getting volunteers to go out and ask their prospects for money. In reality, there's a lot that happens behind the work of that major gifts officer. To help answer the question of what work goes into that to actually prepare the major gifts officer or whoever's doing your major gift fundraising, (your executive director, your development director, board member, etc.), we invited Doug Barker to the podcast. Doug is a principal in Barker and Scott Consulting, which helps organizations grow and fulfill their missions and also helps those organizations get the resources necessary to fulfill their mission. His client list is a veritable, national nonprofit hall of fame including Feeding America, City Year, Save the Children, Special Olympics and more, and if you've not heard of all of those, well then, you're probably not listening to the right podcast. Before founding his firm 16 years ago, he was CIO at the Nature Conservancy and also a consultant with Arthur Andersen. Now, we're not going to ask him about the checkered history of Arthur Andersen at all, but I will say that that back in the day, Arthur Andersen hired the best and the brightest.

Hey, Doug. Thanks for joining us on the podcast today.

Doug Barker: Great to be here.

Dolph Goldenburg: Tell me about the *Major Gifts Playbook*. I assume it's a written playbook. Why did you write it?

Doug Barker: It's a written playbook, and it's unique to each organization. So, every playbook has some consistent factors throughout. When we do a major gifts playbook, we do it specifically for that organization, and we wrote it because, like you were talking about in the introduction, people really understand the soft skills, the people skills, the relationship aspects of major donor fundraising, but there's also a whole that comes along with that part. It's really that combination of the art and science of major gift development that really can make all the difference in the world. We realized particularly when you look across the whole sector, the number of people giving any money to a nonprofit organization continues to go down. With the concentration of wealth, there are fewer gifts, but larger gifts. The major gift portion of fundraising success for nonprofit organizations across the sector increases in its importance, and organizations have very big goals; they're looking to change the world, and a huge way to help them do that is to really put in place the science of major gift fundraising to help them either start a major gifts program or enhance their major gift program.

And what a major gift playbook does is really it provides a common language, a common framework and processes and other things to help organizations get there.

Dolph Goldenburg: I want to take a step back because you had mentioned when you first started talking about the importance of having a major gift playbook, that the number of individuals that are giving to charity is going down. I actually think with the new tax paradigm, there is much less of an incentive for people to give at the lower levels, the 50, the 100, the 500, even the 1,000-dollar level unless you're giving a dozen and a half thousand-dollar gifts. There's really not the same incentive to make a gift to charity.

Doug Barker: Absolutely. These are megatrends. And that's currently, you know, definitely one of them. I think the donor-advised funds will temper that somewhat for some donors. On the whole, the overall trend is definitely toward fewer people giving and fewer incentives for them to give. The reliance on major donors is just paramount in terms of organizations being able to get the resources they need to fulfill their missions. It's a very different set of skills in terms of major donor fundraising versus direct response, volunteer management, advocacy or online fundraising than some of the other pieces. All of those pieces need to be put together because your major donors are also interacting with your organization in multiple ways. It really makes it even all the more important that you have your act together and have something like a playbook behind you so that all the oars are rowing in the same direction.

Dolph Goldenburg: It's interesting that you say you still have to have your direct mail, your peer to peer in your other giving strategies. To charities, I always say, you know, your major donors rarely come in at the \$5,000 level. They'll often give you a \$250 gift and wait and see how much they like you.

Doug Barker: That just makes me think of other nuggets in there, too. Sometimes you'll have these people that are giving you regularly for years and years and years, and then they drop off. What could happen in a lot of these cases, someone who very much loves you, and they've dropped off because now they're on a fixed income, but they're the perfect plan giving person for you down the road. It just shows the importance in all these cases of really looking at lifetime value and really the lifetime value and engagement of our donors and support. The stuff for the major gift playbook really supports that type of donor-centered fundraising.

Dolph Goldenburg: I want to jump in and share with you. When I was the development director at the Saint Vincent De Paul Society, which is a Catholic organization and has a number of older donors. We had a program that I think we called the *Five for Food and Fuel*, and we asked people to give \$5 a month; of course, we put it toward our food pantry and toward helping people with past utilities. You know, this was 20 years ago now, so we would often get handwritten checks that will come to the office, and you would see them, and they were written really you could tell by the shakiness of the penmanship that they were written by people who were probably over 70 and in some cases over 80. It kind of felt like the widow's mite from a Catholic perspective, but the other thing was I always viewed those folks as really good prospects for planned giving because while they might not be able to leave us a million dollars, they might be able to leave us \$25,000 or \$50,000; they want to make sure they've got the nest egg through the rest of their life, but they're willing to give away a big piece of it.

Doug Barker: Absolutely. Those measures where you really looking at the loyalty and the long-term gifts from donors even when they're at that small, more modest amount, it really is a demonstration of their commitment and their love for your organization; you really want to honor that and be open to and help encourage those plan gifts down the road.

Dolph Goldenburg: Talk to me about the major gifts playbook that you helped develop for organizations. What are some of the common sections of that playbook?

Doug Barker: The playbook itself. It has different sections to it. It always has guiding principles, which really get to helping organizations understand how they treat their donors, how they work together, those types of things. Then, it has an overview of the relationship management stages, and the stages are what are commonly known in our sector as **moves management**, and there are certain key ones, but it's interesting, too. So, there was typically, you know, seven stages in there: **identification, qualification, strategy, cultivation, solicitation, gift processing and recognition and stewardship**. For those different pieces, what's really important, it's not just identifying them, but it's really coming up with common terms, identifying common processes and definitions so that your CRM system can support that and so that everyone in the organization is really aware of what's happening in each of those stages. Then lastly, something that is just critically important in the playbook is the performance measures, so it's goals and performance measures, and these are goals and performance measures both for the individual major gift officers but then also for others in the organization. Major donor fundraising as a team sport, and there are roles to be played by multiple people in the organization. How you set these goals and performance measures are huge in terms of the impact they could have in there.

Of course, they're not all focused simply on the gift. They're really focused on the cultivation and maximizing the lifetime value.

Dolph Goldenburg: I love that phrase: **Major giving is a team sport**. Talk to me about the players on that team. What are their positions?

Doug Barker: The players can come from different places in the organization. They can be volunteer board members. They can be executive directors, other executives, etc. Typically, in a cultivation team structure, you've got four different key roles. You've got, in the center, the **relationship manager**. This is usually the major gift officer, and it is one individual; they're really assigned overall accountability for the prospect and responsible for really advancing the relationship and overseeing all day-to-day activities. You've also got (above that) a **potential strategist**, and you can have one or more strategist working with them; they really serve as a coach or a consultant to the relationship manager. It could be an executive director. It could be the chief development officer. It could be a director of prospect research.

It could be multiple different people in the organization, but so often I see where major gift officers are just kind of set out there on their own; that just doesn't work. As a team sport, everyone really needs mentors and guidance and people they can go to and talk through the strategy. The other two key roles are **natural partners**, and natural partners are basically anyone who's got an influential relationship either directly or indirectly with that prospect that can be leveraged. These could be board of director members. It could be other donors; it could be other executives in the organization. It could be staff or could be multiple people, but anyone who knows that donor or prospect really should be part of that cultivation team. Then lastly, there is the program partner, and the program partner play such an important role in the stewardship of the gift.

So often, you've got development sitting on one side and the program mission people sitting on the other side in the organization, and the two don't really connect. This is a way in the *Major Gifts Playbook* to specifically call out the role that the program partners play in creating both the *ask* in terms of the strategy and what's really needed to be funded, but then also played at all important roles in the stewardship. So, there are the four major roles: the relationship manager, strategist, natural partners and program partners. The roles aren't mutually exclusive; you can have one person fill multiple roles.

Dolph Goldenburg: Let's talk for a quick second about the program partner and that relationship with the major gifts officer. I do think program managers will sit back and kind of say, "Hey, why isn't fundraising raising more money for us?" Fundraising will kind of sit back and say, "Hey, how come programs is not working with us more so we can raise money for them, and then we can be more successful as fundraisers as well?" How do you build that relationship between your program partner and your major gifts officer?

Doug Barker: Really great question. I think this is really at the crux of something that really befuddles and holds up so many nonprofit organizations. You include them even in the development of the *Major Gifts Playbook*... You've got all your stakeholders there, so they're understanding from the very beginning, the role they play in helping bring the resources into the organization to fulfill what they need to do programmatically. Then more specifically, the program partners are really responsible for providing all the programmatic content throughout the strategy development, cultivation and the solicitation. They're really assisting in the case for support by providing the data to find... They're assisting in the development of proposals. They're also potentially communicating with the prospects to address any questions that the prospect may have on the organization's programs and other areas.

It really is relationship management. This is high-touch fundraising, one-on-one relationships and where you have a team working on that for multiple things. Your chances for success go way up, and then the one I mentioned before that I just think this is so critical is [inaudible] stewardship of the gift. That stewardship of the gift is really focused on making the impact of gift clear to the donor. That whole process then begins the process of putting that donor back into the cycle again for the next major gift; as I said earlier, is all about lifetime value realization. For the program partners is, by having these roles and these things that are specifically responsible for doing in the playbook and having that part of their personal goals, it really gets explicit for the organization about what everyone's roles are in these things.

And then there are explicit things to that, of course, the relationship manager and the development people need to do to make this easy and fulfilling for the program people. This shouldn't just be something that the program people do kind of in their spare time. This is an important part of nonprofit success.

Dolph Goldenburg: What are some of the very specific ways to steward the gift?

Doug Barker: So, for this, I've actually got a story. It's an interesting one.

Dolph Goldenburg: I love stories.

Doug Barker: I think stories are really what would help drive home the reality of things. A good friend and an executive, he is a major donor, and the love of most of his gifts and the organizations he supports is in the education arena. However, he and his family own a second home on a lake up in New Hampshire. The nature conservancy was looking to preserve some other land around the lake, and he gave a modest gift to them for that preservation.

Conservation was never, you know, his major, passionate love. The nature conservancy invited this individual and his kids and wife to come do a walk around on the particular preserve that he and his neighbors were part of helping preserve. They had fun activities for the kids: Snowshoeing around and looking at different tracks of wildlife, etc. They really made it into an incredibly beautiful day for the whole family in terms of really making real results. Because of this, even though this donor readily admits that the nature conservancy wasn't top of his list in terms of passion, this day of active stewardship to really see what the results, the tangible results of the gifts that he made were, had him increase his gift significantly. He was so impressed with the organization being good stewards of his gift and really using it for its intended purpose.

And then you can see something similar. I mean, if you're an education organization and you're reaching out, bring someone to the classroom. In some cases, you can't bring people to the front lines of what you do, but you can still, just through a presentation or through web access, whatever, get people close to the mission and to the impact of their gift. Throughout all of these processes you're doing, you're taking - and that's one of the major kind of fundamental principles within a major gift playbook and within doing this - every interaction you're having with a prospect or a donor is an opportunity to deepen the relationship. You should be learning more about the donor, and as you're learning things, capture that, put it in your CRM system, sharing it, include the strategy. Then also share more information so that like, in any good relationship, you're deepening the connections by sharing more with one another. It's a two-way street.

I'm always shocked that organizations don't send birthday cards to their major donors because most of the major donors on social media. You can go to Facebook, and most people list what their birthday is. It's not that hard to figure out. My birthday card list currently is about 500 every year. On Sunday, afternoons I look at the birthdays that are coming up that week and I sit down, and I write (and they're real cards, not Goldenburg Group cards) real cards to people. I cannot tell you how often people will say to me, "This is the first birthday card I've gotten in the mail since my mother passed away because it's only our parents that send us that kind of stuff." People love that kind of personalized attention.

Doug Barker: People love that kind of personalized attention. My birthday is May 19th, by the way.

Dolph Goldenburg: Good to know. I'm going to have 501. I send a lot of notes and cards by United States Postal Service, and I jokingly say to people, "You know that I keep good high paying postal jobs inside our borders. That's part of my role in life is to keep the post office going."

Doug Barker: It's interesting because a big part of what you're talking about here with the birthday, but beyond that too, it's really creating kind of institutional memory around your major donors; it's listening to them. It's really listening to not just what their interest are in terms of supporting your organization, not just what their preferences are in terms of how they like to be

communicated with and engaged and all of those types of things, but you're also listening to where they're at in their personal life. What are their values, what things are happening in their personal life? This is where a lot of the art comes in because you don't want to be too invasive in people's lives, but at the same time, you are having a one on one relationship. If the person is sharing information about their children or their parents or an illness they're having or anything going on, if they're sharing that, it's the kind of information with which you want to do what friends do. What friends do is they listened to one another, and they remember things about one another; they ask about how those things are going for the person which validates people. It makes them feel heard, and they're valued. That's a huge part of really maximizing that lifetime value and really building that kind of loyalty. It's not the type of thing that you want to fake. You need to genuinely be interested so you need to have gift officers and others that really care about their major donors and see them not just as a way to fund the organization, but as individuals who on their journey are called to the same mission and support.

Dolph Goldenburg: I could not agree with you enough that you've got to have fundraisers who like people and like having relationships with people. You know, the curmudgeon might be great at managing your database but not great at being a fundraiser.

Doug Barker: Here is something that I think is a huge takeaway for everyone listening today. If you do nothing else, this is one thing that really has tremendous value: this work of major donor fundraising and the major gift playbook, a critical component of that is your own very personal commitment to the organization. Everyone within an organization, and this means all the board members, the executives, major gift officers, etc., needs to have a very personal, passionate story about the organization. What drew them to the mission, their relationship with it? The stories could go multiple different ways, but practicing, homing in, and being able to effectively share that very personal, passionate commitment to the organization is an important part of building a culture of successful major gift fundraising.

It's something that, I was recently asked by an organization to potentially come in for a strategic board retreat and work with the different board members to help everyone develop that kind of personal, passionate story to be able to share. It's amazing when we've worked with different organizations... just the major gift officers and the executives in encouraging everyone to develop this... Then we'll even do workshops and other types of things for this. How far it goes in terms of really putting front and center of the heart of what this is all about, which is really connections and relationships.

Dolph Goldenburg: I'd like to take that a step further ask if you agree with what I am about to say. By the way, you know it's 100 percent. Okay to disagree. You can be like, “[inaudible] you're whacked,” and we'll keep that in the podcast. We won't edit it out.

I actually think that the executives of an organization (the executive director, the development director, the chief program officer, et cetera) should all be major donors at some level to that organization. They need to have the same skin in the game as major donors do. Maybe it's not a \$50,000 annual gift, but you know, a thousand dollars annual gift should be pretty doable for most executives that are making a professional salary.

Doug Barker: It varies a lot of organization to organization and culture to culture, but I actually agree with you on this one doll. It is just like having your own passionate play a or passionate story to tell. I think having some skin in the game is incredibly important.

Dolph Goldenburg: I also think it speaks volumes to your donors. When your donors look at the donor list, and they see the executive directors listed and you'll maybe it's not a \$10,000 gift, but you know, they're like, okay, well you know the ED is working in a nonprofit sector gives a thousand or \$2,500. They see the development directors listed. They see the chief program officer is listed. They think, "Okay, these are staff members that aren't just there because they get a salary. They are there because they're really committed to this."

Doug Barker: Also, you can see for organizations were volunteer events, and other things are really important. Likewise, it's important I think for executives and staff to be out there and showing their commitment as well and be part of that. You see that with organizations like Special Olympics International and others. It speaks volumes to their commitment to their mission and to making this a better world.

Dolph Goldenburg: Well, Doug, we're going to take a short break, and when we come back, I'm hoping we're going to talk about two things. The first is the implementation of your major gifts playbook, and I understand that this might be a book that's about to be released. I'm hoping we can talk about that as well.

Doug Barker: Thank you.

Dolph Goldenburg: The Successful Nonprofits™ Podcast is produced by the [Goldenburg Group](#) as part of our mission to provide board development, strategic planning, and interim leadership that helps nonprofits thrive in a competitive environment.

Just as you want to have a playbook for your major gifts program, you also want to have a playbook for your board. You want a board that has strong meeting participation, understands their roles and responsibilities, follows through on their commitments, and yes, as part of your major gifts playbook, also raises money for you. So, if your board is not quite there, you should get a copy of my book. [Successful Nonprofits Build Supercharged Boards](#); it has a 10-step system that will provide you with tools and techniques and all the proceeds from this book, and I say this all the time, whenever I promote, all the proceeds from this book, go to support the production of this podcast. We don't commoditize it. We don't have ads for underwear that fits you. We don't have ads for meals that will be delivered to your home. We really don't have ads, so the only way we support the production costs of this podcast is through the royalties that I get when we sell a book; so, visit Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or better yet, walk down to your local bookstore and say, hey, why don't you order a copy of this book? It's also available in a number of library systems across the country.

Welcome back, Doug. Let's talk about the implementation of your *Major Gifts Playbook*.

Doug Barker: The implementation is important. The *Major Gifts Playbook* and the specifics in it vary from organization to organization. A huge part of setting the implementation up for success is to have all the right stakeholders involved in the development of the playbook itself. The playbook really represents the collective best thinking and consensus of the executives in the

organization. We often involve board members in that as well as the voluntary board members and then the major gift officers and then all the people that this support them in the work that they do. The implementation varies quite a bit of organization to organization. There's always some training involved. With some organizations, the training can get fairly specific. We were working with one organization that was very much moving from being just event focused to major donor fundraising, and they really didn't have a robust major gift fundraising program. We actually did workshops and training where we would do roleplaying where they would do exploratory calls with process is to qualify them.

Dolph Goldenburg: I love roleplaying, and I do that all the time with boards. It really helps them not just hone their pitch but overcome their fear of doing it.

Doug Barker: I'm so glad to hear you say that because I think that that is something that very often people don't do. They get into meetings and they talk about what they want to do, but there is nothing like actually doing it and practice doing it. What it creates is tremendous empathy and support for one another amongst the team. Like we were saying earlier, this is a team sport.

Dolph Goldenburg: I don't know if this is your experience or not, but whenever I'm like, okay, we're about to do roleplay. I can tell by the looks on people's faces that they're really reluctant to do it. However, by the end of our role-playing session, they are typically pretty happy that we've done it. Is that your experience?

Doug Barker: Absolutely. I mean you've got some that are just painfully shy in some ways, but for the most part, everyone know they're normally happy. They did it. They learned a lot from it, and they've created closer relationships with one another. We are in the relationship building business. This is all about relationship management. You're strengthening those ties within the organization that I think pay huge dividends down the road. It's also another way, where you've got board and staff together in some of these meetings roleplaying, to get much closer with one another. Typically, when we implement this we use either a trial version or a pilot version or other types of things. The idea with the major gift playbook is that it's a living, breathing playbook, and this is particularly important with some of the goals and performance measures. We'll often say, "Okay, here's the initial set of goals and performance measures that we will lay out for an organization," and we'll begin to track those. In some cases, they're kind of stretch goals and they've pushed people in some ways that they really hadn't been pushed in before.

There are all kinds of transparency around all the different cultivation steps people are taking or not taking in terms of substantially moving that relationship forward. We try to set this up so that it's not a punitive thing in any way, but something where you're looking at those performance measures and things as, as opportunities for people to grow, to get better coaching and to really home in on what you need to do. Another thing that we've discovered that has been hugely important is pipeline management. Pipeline management is looking at where your prospects are at in the pipeline and then taking the key ones and really moving those to the next stage. We've actually put people in organizations that help coach them through pipeline review and pipeline management meetings. There are certain successful elements to that and you really kind of look at what you need to do to really review who's in there and talk about that as a team together and get things to the next level. Those are some initial thoughts on implementation. I would be happy to dive down into any details.

Dolph Goldenburg: Doug, we're running out of time, and I never wanted to deprive our listeners of the Off-the-Map question. I have got a phenomenal Off-the-Map question for you. In the intro, I had mentioned that you were the CIO of a large national or nonprofit. Thus, you are obviously a data guru. You don't get to be the CIO of an organization unless you really get data. Tell us how you keep all of your personal data in your life organized. This includes birthdays, the personal contacts, the passwords, the stack of mail by the door, the dog's vet appointment, etc. How do you keep all that organized?

Doug Barker: For better or worse, I am a Microsoft SharePoint and Outlook person, but It's interesting when I look at my contacts in Outlook, I use that extensively. I capture not just the person's name and their contact information, but I also add their birthday. I ask their kids' names; I add any other notes or key correspondence. I really use that as my personal constituent database, and I've got my clients in there. I've got my coworkers, friends, family, everybody. But within there, I've really got an active record of anybody, and anytime I find any kind of personal information I want to remember about somebody, I just go there and put it in. It has served me very well over the years and for the mail that comes, I just have an of old fashioned inbox and outbox. I still maintain it at home a file cabinet with manila folders in it alphabetized and all the records and everything for the tax returns and all that kind of stuff. I'm fairly organized.

Dolph Goldenburg: Sounds like you sort of live and die by Microsoft Outlook and Sharepoint.

Doug Barker: If I didn't have my calendar in my contacts and other things, I wouldn't know what I'm supposed to do today.

Dolph Goldenburg: For folks that are not aware, what is SharePoint?

Doug Barker: SharePoint is a Microsoft tool that basically provides common space for calendaring, for sharing files and notes and working as teams or groups amongst a whole group of people that you can define. It's really an extension of Office 365 in terms of a collaborative tool for organizations to use and beyond organization. You can use it within your organization, or you can use it as well cross-organizational.

Dolph Goldenburg: Doug, thank you so much for being with us on the podcast today. I always want to make sure that our listeners know how to reach out to you. I would absolutely encourage that our listeners go to your website, www.barkerandscott.com. At that website they can learn about your services strategy. That includes things like strategy and planning, technology and tools, and of course management services. They also can check out your [blog](#) and subscribe to your [newsletter](#) from that website. Now, before I let you go, I do have to ask, I understand that you have a book that is about to be released that's based on the Major Gifts Playbook. Can you when it's going to be released, how people can get it, that kind of thing?

Doug Barker: We don't have a date for the release yet, but we're very excited. The *Major Gifts Playbook* is something that we see as just a critically valuable thing for the whole sector. The book is going to really lay out the whole process and organization takes as well as provide all the different pieces that go into a playbook. We're kind of really giving it away, and we're looking forward to this book coming out before the end of the year. What we're hoping that it will come out late summer to early fall. Go to www.barkerandscott.com and get onto our newsletter. When

the book comes out, we definitely hope to share it far and wide because I think it's got a lot of great things in it and uh, so looking forward to that.

Dolph Goldenburg: That's great, Doug. Thank you so much, and thank you for being on the podcast.

Doug Barker: Great. Thank you so much.

Dolph Goldenburg: What a great conversation with Doug, and whether your organization has a mature major gifts program or no major gifts program, I know that his upcoming book, that Major Gifts Playbook will be an incredible resource for the people in your development office or your executive suite, and of course, don't forget the program people because this does not work without your program people. I think my takeaway from today is that fundraising is a team sport, and I sure I'm going to start telling clients this as I work with them around fundraising projects. If you were so busy during this podcast on Facebook, looking up your donors birthdates and adding them into the CRM or looking for great birthday cards to send to your donors that you were unable to write down Doug Barker's URL, no worries, just crank up the browser and visit www.successfulnonprofits.com, and you can get all of his contact information from our show notes. Don't forget to subscribe to our podcast and your stream or of choice, and if you're already subscribed, then go ahead and rate and review the podcast. It costs you nothing and makes you feel great and helps other people find out about this podcast. That is our show for this week. I hope you have gained some insight to help your nonprofit thrive in a competitive environment.

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