

## **The Secrets To Hosting a Successful, Money Making, Fundraiser Garage Sale** by Mary Sigmann, CPO®

Can a small organization host a fundraising garage sale and make over \$5,000 in two days? You bet! It's been done at the Unity Church in Ames, Iowa. Mary Sigmann, Certified Professional Organizer®, Licensed Unity Teacher and coordinator of these garage sales shares her secrets.

### **FORM A COMMITTEE**

Once a group is motivated to clear out unneeded and unwanted items from their lives and donate to those items to the sale, you are on your way. Those people have 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, a volunteer 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 organization's property or location, at a rented space, or on property owned by one of the organization's members. By having the sale at the organization's or a member's site, you save the cost of renting a space.

### **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 used a small year-round storage facility that contributed greatly to the success of the sale. Members were able to bring donations at any time of the year.

### **CONSIDER TIMING**

Spring and 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 secondhand school clothes and holiday decorations and gifts. However, the

weather can be unpredictable during these times. If possible, hold an indoor sale.

### **ADVERTISE**

The better your event is advertised, the more successful it will be. Advertise as heavily as your budget will allow. There are several options including flyers, newspaper classifieds, radio and even cable TV. If your location is not on a well-travelled or well-known 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, clear plastic bags of various sizes for 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. Don't bother with anything under a quarter. If it's not worth a quarter, it isn't worth the space at your sale. A guideline for determining prices is to ask yourself, "If I needed this, what would I be willing to pay for it?"

### **THE BIG DAY**

The sale should run one or two days. 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. 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 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.

Make sure the sale is a fun-filled event - a celebration. However, avoid combining the garage sale with other fundraisers 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.
2. Don't hesitate to give the items that are not in top-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**

When the sale is over you may still have lots of stuff to take to the Salvation Army, Women's Shelters, Homeless Shelters, Goodwill and other charities. Don't save unsold merchandise for next year's sale, 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 Certified Professional Organizer®, coach and speaker. Contact Mary at [www.organizer-coach.com](http://www.organizer-coach.com), at [harmonypro@aol.com](mailto:harmonypro@aol.com), or at 515-233-5191.