

Dan Barkin:

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You 'Fed the Need.' Thanks

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If you gave me a buck last Saturday at the Bojangles' in Knightdale, that means you are a real philanthropist, because I am one truly bad fundraiser.

I spent a couple of hours outside the restaurant's front door for our newspaper's Feed the Need drive. The N&O had people all over the Triangle collecting for the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina.

So, yes, that was me standing there in my Feed the Need apron, the bald, beefy guy who had trouble looking you square in the eye.

Asking for money

I never had a problem going up to strangers when I was a reporter and asking very personal questions. But asking people for money is hard, even for a good cause.

At a time of \$3.40 gas, rising food prices and a weak economy, I feared that people would be tight with their cash.

I did learn a few things.

One is that you can't predict who will give you money by their cars.

I got more donations from folks driving old, unremarkable automobiles than I did from owners of late-model fancy cars.

Another is that people are carrying less cash and more debit cards, and that can't be good news for outfits that raise money the spare-change way.

Drive-through dollars

And the most important lesson: If you are part of a fundraising team working a fast-food restaurant, the best gig is the drive-through lane around noon, when the cars back up.

Amber Nimocks, an N&O editor in the Features department, was savvy enough to figure that out, and she cleaned up.

At my lowest point, a long stretch when I was getting zilch, a mom pulled up in a car with a front license plate: "Christ is the Answer."

I said to myself, Danny boy, if you can't get a dollar here, your childlike faith in folks is misplaced.

I made my approach. She glanced my way and -- out of pity for me? Christian charity? -- came up with a buck.

Another test

My faith was tested again just before my shift was due to end at 1 p.m.

A guy pulls into the Bojangles' lot in a sharp-looking PT Cruiser at 12:58. I know because I checked the time.

"A dollar for the Food Bank?" I ask. He says: "I'll get you on the way out."

Amber comes over. I tell her, "This guy said he'll give me a buck on his way out. Do I believe him or not?"

I don't know whether he's going to be eating his four-piece Chicken Supremes for the next 30 minutes in the restaurant, or if he's pulling my leg, or what.

For a moment, I'm tempted to finesse the issue by pulling a dollar out of my wallet and calling it a day.

But, nope, I decide to wait a few minutes and see what happens.

Five minutes pass, and what do you know, Mr. PT Cruiser comes walking out with his take-out order, reaches into his pocket and gives me a dollar.

A man of his word. God bless.

Yes, I'm pathetic

So you're wondering how I did in my shift. Well, I raised around \$14, which doesn't sound like a lot. OK. It isn't a lot.

But, according to the Food Bank's formula, the agency can deliver \$8 worth of groceries for every \$1 donated.

So the dollar you gave me will provide more than a dollar's worth of food to needy families.

I could have made that point clearer on Saturday in Knightdale, if I wasn't such a sorry fund-raiser.

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