

Running a marathon for charity

Marathons are becoming ever more popular, and more runners applying for places means it is becoming increasingly difficult to get one through the ballot. But disappointment at not getting an official place opens up the possibility of running the race for charity, and if done properly, raising money can be as much fun as your training for the big race.

Following 5 simple principles can save you time and effort, and help maximise the amount you can raise.

But before all of that, you need a target.

Setting a realistic target

You need to ask yourself how much money you think you can raise. We all live busy lives and raising money for charity is on top of the day job. That said, family, friends and colleagues will be happy to help, so this calculation is a good start.

STEP 1: Make a list of ALL the people you know: family, friends and colleagues, no matter how close or not so close your relationship and draw up an email contact list.

STEP 2: Multiply the total number of people in your list by £10.00. Many of them will sponsor you more than this amount, but there will be a handful who will give you less.

STEP 3: Take this figure and subtract £300.00. This will provide you with a safety net.

You now have your first target. Setting your sights relatively low means that potential sponsors will be able to see how they can help you achieve it quickly. You can then revise this initial target as your fundraising gathers momentum.

'5 principles' of raising sponsorship

After setting your target you are ready to start fundraising.

It is important to start fundraising as soon as you start the formal training for the marathon. It reinforces the commitment you have made to run the race. Applying the following 5 principles will mean this part of the marathon experience should be as enjoyable as the training.

To maximise your efforts, it is important to be:

Personal

Choose your charity with care. There are 1000s of good causes, but you need to find a personal link with one of them. This link will come through when you write to people asking them for money. You also need to tell people what they will be paying for. By providing precise information on what different values of sponsorship will provide for your chosen charity, sponsors can identify with their contribution. Much better than feeling their money is just going to a good cause. You may also discover colleagues and business associates empathise with what you are doing. I discovered this when raising money whilst training for my first marathon, which gave me insights into people I thought I knew well.

Professional

You may be running a marathon for the first time and so raising sponsorship for the first time, a part-time task for you, but a full-time one for charities. They rely on people like you and every year capitalise on large running events, such as the London Marathon. Don't be flippant about your ability to help them. It is a serious business and so you should approach sponsorship in the same way as your training, with dedication and effort. When preparing your email for potential sponsors use as few words as possible to get across your message. Be precise and clear about the reasons for your fundraising and how sponsors can make a donation. Try your message with friends before sending it out.

Persistent

You need to be persistent, but not pushy. When training for a marathon it is easy to forget that there are other important things in the world. It can take over your life without you realizing. This need not mean you alienate the people who are trying to help you. You will find that many people will respond to requests very quickly, possibly within the first few hours. Many will intend to respond, but will not do so for a few days, or even weeks. Gentle reminders – every two or three weeks – are useful to help reinforce your message. Send this to EVERYONE on your contact list, as it is an opportunity to provide them with an update on your progress.

Proactive

How proactive you want to be depends on how much you want to be local, or even national celebrity. There are plenty of ways of raising the profile of what you are doing, such as articles in staff magazines, local newspapers, professional journals, or even local TV and radio. Use your personal and business contacts shamelessly. For example, if you know people in the media, use them. They are always keen to hear about interesting stories, so be prepared to think of an 'angle' if you need to.

Practical

Gone are the days of handing around a sponsorship form. Email and the internet have made things far easier and using both can save you a huge amount of time and effort, not only in marketing yourself, but also in collecting donations. Register a page at www.justgiving.com. It is an excellent service. Your emails should refer potential sponsors directly to the website – they can either donate immediately, or make a pledge. Those wishing to pay you by old-fashioned cheque will no doubt write and ask you, but avoiding giving them that option in the first place will make your fundraising more efficient.

Use these principles as your guide and money raising can be as much as the training and running the marathon itself. You will be revisiting your webpage every couple of hours to check on your running total and see the messages of support from those kind enough to make a donation to your charitable cause.

On the day of the race itself you will feel as if you have an army of supporters cheering you on.

Good luck and happy running.

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