

## Secrets of Schnorring, Lesson 101

by Edward Serotta

Although I am most proud of the fact that along with my colleagues I have helped create an entirely new concept in preserving Jewish heritage through the unique combination of oral history, vernacular photography, and the internet, it seems that more people are impressed that I could actually find the money for such an ephemeral, unique program than the program itself.

Let me be honest: I find it a bit embarrassing to be sitting here. I don't *want* to be a good schnorrer. I don't *want* to be a good salesman—pushing my institute to foundations, the government, and the media. I don't *like* doing *any* of this.

But since I have specialized in writing, photographing, and making films about Jews in Central Europe for nearly twenty years, I know this: if you choose to get involved with projects that cannot possibly turn a profit, then you must realize you're going to have to schnor to get the money to do them. As the Americans say, if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.

Let's get down to some specifics on how you can do these things:

- how to fundraise
- how to position yourself
- how to create an image
- how to grab the press

- how to use the government

Because all these play off of each other. You cannot see them in isolation from each other. You need to create, as it were, a *gesamtwerk*. And let me be clear: I've spent twenty years doing this and the subject you and I are covering today really should be done in a series of seminars or in a book or both. So I'm only going to touch on the highlights.

## **Fundraising**

We start with fundraising.

This is a pretty unpleasant job. The majority of people you ask will turn you down. Some won't even understand what you asked for; others will never reply; still others will send you a form letter.

But as any salesman will tell you (and sorry to say it, but you are a salesman if you're a fundraiser), if you're not hearing *no* a lot, then you're simply not asking enough people.

Never think that the project you are involved with is qualitatively better than other projects. Every foundation director's desk is loaded up with other applications. I'm sure they're *all* worthwhile. It's our job to make ours get noticed more.

The most obvious thing in applying for a grant is to study the foundation carefully.

- What are their criteria?
- What have they funded before?
- What sort of grants do they normally give out?

- What do they *not* give money for?

And then you have to do some research—see if you can find out who is on their board or who advises them. If you know these people, or even one of them, go visit them and tell them about your project.

But here's the key: frame your project—to this person as well as your grant application—so that it fits the criteria of the foundation.

Some foundations *only* support research.

Some foundations *only* support publications.

Some foundations *never* purchase computers.

Lots of foundations support training seminars and the bringing of different people together.

Put yourself on the other side of the desk. Remember, if it's *your* job to give out someone else's money, you are going to be damn careful how you give it out.

In fact, let's sit on the other side of that desk for a moment and let's say someone comes to us. Wouldn't you ask:

- how do I know they will finish this project?
- how do I know there's even a need for it?
- how much are they looking for?
- who else is giving money for it?
- how will the project live on after I give money to it?
- is there anyone I respect who supports it?

In other words, your proposal has to address every one of these points. In regards to a proposal, please see the handout I'm giving you.

## **Financial Reporting**

Let's say you get a grant. Some foundations, and especially government ministries, require serious reporting. Here's what I do: whatever they ask for, we give them more. More reports, more details, big, thick binders. Details down to things like copies of not only the plane tickets, but the monthly bank statement proving the charge went through.

Why do we do this? Because we know that when a foundation really, really trusts you, you can ask for more money. And they will feel safe about giving it.

## **Personal Visits**

Whenever and wherever possible, try to get what Americans call 'face time' with the people you're asking money from. I promise you a thousand times that this works. And if, in case you can't get face time, get on the phone with the person, before you send in your proposal and then afterwards, when you offer to have a phone meeting to walk them—briefly—through the proposal.

During your visit, you want to tell the person about your project, that it is a genuinely important, necessary project to do; you want to show him or her something about it, and then say something like: 'And here is what I would like you to do. The total budget is \$100,000 and we have already raised (for instance) \$70,000. The *only* thing we lack is \$30,000, which we need in three instalments over the course of three years (or whatever). Everything else is done and the other foundations have already signed up, as you can see. So I'd like to give you this opportunity to join us in what is really going to

be a great project, just so we can finish it up'. (What's the message here? We're using the psychological principle of closure—he will think to himself, 'Oh, he's already got everything he needs and I just have to add a little something and the project's done'.)

Whether you like talking about money or not, you have to do it, and you have to be specific. Remember this: if a foundation person looks at you and says, 'But what do you want me to do?', it means you have been neither clear nor specific.

I know this because it's happened to me.

There's a book out—I'm told—I haven't seen it, called *Don't Make Me Think*, and it's a book for managers. The idea behind this is: 'I'm so damn busy, I have so much on my desk, and now here you come to blabber away in front of me. Just give me a reasonable proposal, make it simple, and tell me what to do'.

### **Building an Image**

When Bill Clinton was president, his advisors put him and his administration into permanent campaign mode—meaning, they acted like they were running for election almost all the time, even when they weren't. Now to a degree, this is an exaggeration because some serious business did get done, but the lesson for us, as fundraisers, is to make sure your two audiences—those who are already your donors and those you hope will be your donors—know about your progress. Actually, in marketing terms, you have a third audience: those who are on the outside and will move slowly toward you, first by recognition and then by giving.

Just for the record, this is called moving up the value chain. The example of this is when you go to a store and stand there looking at all the toothpaste. Why do you

choose one brand over the others? Because over time, the manufacturer has moved his product up the value chain in your head and made you reach out and buy his toothpaste.

When you have reached, let's say, 100 interviews or hired a new director, or invented a new way of cooking chicken soup, write a press release and send it out. When you have added an important new donor, be sure the others know it. And every once in a while, you should send a report or a letter to every one of your donors, so they will know how well their donations are doing.

You would also be wise to put out an annual report.

As for a PR brochure, you need one. The point is, these can be expensive to make, but we make our own at Centropa, and I'm happy to say that they are so attractive that we now earn extra money by making brochures for some of the foundations that give us money.

But make them look nice, and I'll be honest here: any idiot can design. Just go to the bookstore, buy a few good books on "prize winning designs," and steal from them like crazy. We at Centropa would, of course, never do this. Not that you could prove, anyway.

## **Press**

You need it. The question is: how to get it. And here you need to get hold of the local newspaper reporters and editors, tell them that you are launching a new program or project, that it's something completely new and different and has never been done before, that it's exciting and cutting edge, or that it uncovers some pretty important facts that we just didn't know about for the past xx number of years.

In other words, put yourself in the place of the person you're talking with and make the story exciting and worth covering.

I always concentrate on the non-Jewish press first. You can go after the Jewish press afterwards.

### **Tag Line**

This is the slogan that goes with every product. I'm sorry to use mostly American products, but remember that in marketing, a tag line is where you want your product to live in your donor's head.

For instance, the tag line for Lufthansa is 'There's no better way to fly'. When Federal Express came out, they always said: 'When it absolutely, positively has to get there overnight'.

You need a line that people will remember about your project. For instance, my first book was *Out of the Shadows*, and I explained it all in one sentence: I went looking for the last Jews of Eastern Europe, and I found that no one wanted to be my last Jew.

For my book on Jews in Sarajevo during the Serb siege of the city, I said, 'In this war, Jews are not the victims. In this war, Jews are saving the Christians and Muslims'.

And when I started our Centropa project, I said, 'This is not a project about how Jews died during the Holocaust. It's about how they lived—before, during and after'.

This tag line is the one thing you want people to remember about your project, because in general, that's all they *will* remember.

## **Public and Corporate Money**

Finally, let's talk about public and corporate money.

I'll be honest, corporate money doesn't generally go to any religious projects, and it's nothing to do with Jews, although I can't imagine that a bank or corporation cares much about its image with an ethnic group that makes up .0003 percent of the population.

But you can, in some cases, find some government money, but be forewarned: this will take a lot of time, require a lot of paperwork, and a lot of lobbying on your part. Nevertheless, the culture and science ministries very often support projects of various kinds, and the foreign ministry might also help you, if you show how your project will make your country look good in the EU or in Washington. What you need to do is learn about all the departments in each of these ministries—who does what is very important. For instance, most education ministries have bilateral departments, which means they work with ministries in other countries. Same with the culture ministries. And if, let's say, you want to preserve Jewish property or cemeteries, very often the interior or environment ministry has funds for this kind of thing.

Those are the basic points of my talk. As I said, all I want to do is give you a greatest hits, a shopping list, so to speak, about what you need to do to advocate, fundraise, and build an image around your project.

I'll leave you with a line from Cornell Capa, founder of the International Center of Photography in New York. At the opening he gave me in 1991 for my first book, I took Cornell aside and said, 'I can't thank you enough for all you've done'.

He looked at me and shook his head. Here's all he said: 'I gave you something to cook with. Now go cook'.