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The Gala Is Over. What About Your Commitment?

Le gala bénéfice est fini. Et votre engagement, lui?

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> This is an AI-generated English translation of Daniel H. Lanteigne's original French-language column, provided for reference. Read the original in French on Les Affaires → https://www.lesaffaires.com/opinions/le-gala-benefice-est-fini-et-votre-engagement-lui/

Like me, you probably don't mind attending a fundraising event from time to time.

The food is usually good. You run into people you know and meet some new ones. Sometimes there's a circus act or someone breathing fire. Then comes the auction, where you bid far too much on a spa package because, well, it's for a good cause. I'm joking a little, but you get the idea.

Behind all this is a distinction worth considering. By buying a ticket, you supported a good cause. We agree on that. But does that automatically make you a donor to the organization? Not necessarily.

Before foundations stop inviting me, let me qualify that. Keep buying tickets! Fill the rooms, invite your colleagues, and buy a whole table if you can.

But let's call things what they are. An event ticket is, at least in part, a transaction.

You pay and receive something in return: a meal, an experience, entertainment, networking, sometimes a little prestige. And for tax-receipt purposes, the value of certain benefits received must be deducted to determine the eligible portion of the donation.

Take a look at your receipt next time. Your $750 gala ticket probably won't earn you a $750 charitable donation receipt. And that's perfectly normal.

"Yes, but a gala ticket is already expensive!"

Exactly. You just talked about *paying*, not *giving*. The distinction may seem semantic, but it says a great deal.

I'm not telling you to pull out your credit card a second time before dessert. But if the cause truly resonated with you, why let the relationship end at the coat check?

A donation, even a modest one, can extend that relationship. So can volunteering, or simply following the organization and learning more about its work. After all, let's be honest for a moment. During the gala, did you really listen to the entire speech about the mission? There you go.

The Day After the Gala

The foundation proudly announces that it raised more than last year. Photos of the packed room circulate on social media. Sponsors are thanked. The host and organizing committees can finally get some sleep (and they've certainly earned it).

Well done. Truly. Having done it myself, I know how much work goes into a few short hours. But there's another number I'd like to know. How many people will take a second action for the organization in the coming months?

How many will make a donation without a meal, a show, or a spa package in return? How many will take the time to better understand the mission? How many will become volunteers, ambassadors, or regular donors?

That may be the real issue. A gala shouldn't be just a fundraising activity. It can also be the beginning of a relationship. But a first date doesn't go very far if no one gets in touch the next day.

Foundations Have a Role to Play

It would be easy to criticize attendees for coming for dinner, connections, or entertainment, then leaving without trying to learn more about the cause. That would mostly be a little lazy on my part. Because a philanthropic relationship is built by two parties.

Some foundations understand this very well. They use the event to strengthen ties with their donors or begin a conversation that will continue after the evening.

Others knowingly organize an event almost exclusively to raise their profile. Not every organization has a flagship event that has been on the business community's calendar for years. Wanting to build awareness first is perfectly legitimate.

The problem is capturing all that attention… and letting it slip away!

Organizations sometimes spend months choosing a venue, bringing together an honorary committee, and making sure everything is perfect. Then what do they do with the 400, 600, or 1,000 people who have just given them a few hours of their attention?

Sometimes, very little. Not out of laziness, but simply because teams are small, resources are limited, and the day after the gala, they have to get back to everything else. So perhaps the next step won't come from the foundation. That's no reason for no one to take it. You do it.

Visit the organization again. Sign up for its communications. Make a donation if you can. Give it a second chance to tell you about its mission, this time without background music or a live auctioneer.

Taking One More Step

I'm not trying to pit fundraising events against "real" donations. An event can fund the mission, raise awareness, and create encounters that might never otherwise have happened. All of that matters.

Once the hors d'oeuvres have been eaten, the gift bag handed out, and the tax receipt put away, what remains of your commitment? So yes, keep buying tickets (please don't stop). But next time, take one more step. The evening may introduce you to a cause, but commitment begins when you choose not to forget it the next day.

And speaking of events, I have to admit I was truly charmed by the latest gala hosted by the Fondation des jeunes de la DPJ. What can I say? I love oysters too!