Cathy’s Johnson, Veteran Rider and Top Fundraiser, Shares her Methods

In October 2016, I rode in my eighth TdP. It was my sixth ride in five consecutive years, I’ve never had an issue raising well over the minimum and over 90% of my donors are repeat donors and contribute every year. In fact, last year I raised the most ever—$10,175! If my calculations are correct, I’ve now proudly raised over $49,000 for TdP. Over the years, I’ve developed a method that has been highly successful for me and I think it will work for you.

My primary tool is an email letter to prospective donors. I send a group email with everyone BCC’d. The most important piece of advice I can give you is: make it personal. I always include information about YSC and state the organization’s mission and who it serves. In years past, I’ve given a brief history of the ride and how much it means to the organization’s success. However, I firmly believe people donate to YOU, whether or not they may have a direct connection to breast cancer in young women. I ALWAYS include personal reasons why I am riding—what this ride means to me and how much their support and encouragement of my effort means to me. I want people to be engaged in my effort and I take them on my journey. My donors know we are Team CJ and Babe is my bike. I include photos of Babe and me in every communication, including the initial ask. People love the photos and it makes a personal connection. Bring your donors along on your journey; make them feel included, my success is their success as I tell my story. I send out thank you emails the same day I receive a donation, if possible, and definitely within one day. I have a basic template but I always say something unique to that donor.

Tips:

- **Set up your fundraising page.** Include lots of photos! Use the same letter that you email to your donors in your biography. Customize the fundraising URL (put it in your letter several times). Don’t use the TdP template— personalize!

- **I set my initial fundraising goal lower than what I hope to raise.** Last year, I started at $3000, which I hit within one week of sending my initial letter. People like to “put you over,” so I continually raise it on my TdP page when I meet the goal.

- **I do post my link on Facebook a few times during the fundraising period.** I don’t get a lot of donations from FB but usually pick up a couple people that aren’t on my email distribution.

- **Be organized.** I have a spreadsheet of all the people I send the initial letter to, how much they donate and that I’ve sent a thank you. If I don’t hear back after a month, I send a reminder email with my original letter and an update on how much I’ve raised to date. **I’ll send a total of two reminder letters, never more.**

- **Send email updates on your training and fundraising progress.** Again, this is about keeping your donors engaged and interested. I usually send my initial ask letter in July or August. I try to do one email update per month leading up to the ride. It doesn’t have to be long—I’ll tell a couple stories from my training and always include a couple photos. A few days before the ride, I send out another letter.

- **I take a list of names of people for whom I ride in memory of and in honor of.** In my first update email, I ask donors to send me names of people they would like me to ride for—to honor or remember.
Nightly updates from the road. People LOVE the emails I send every night. I don’t promise that I will be able to do it, but I really try to do so and always have. Photos from the day, of course, are a staple. Again, it’s about engagement. Plus, I get lots of replies (people know I can’t respond to individual emails) and they are wonderful and motivating to me, especially when I am tired and sore.

After the ride, I send out a final ride update and thank you within 7-10 days of the ride end. Photos are included, of course! I always mention I hope I can count on their continued support.

Good luck—you can do it!