



## Temple Building in Bali: A Cautionary Tale

By Stuart Grover, Ph.D., Chairman Emeritus

In my quarter century of consulting and working at The Collins Group, I have relied on three rules:

- Gifts should be requested in person by peers whenever possible
- Gifts should follow a top-down order, with the largest gifts secured before requests are made for smaller amounts
- Requests should be made for a specific amount determined by careful analysis of each potential donor

And, unsurprisingly, the most frequent complaints/questions I heard were challenges to these three rules: “Wouldn’t it be better to invite everyone to give whatever they want? Wouldn’t it work better to have everyone give a little, rather than putting people on the spot by asking them for enormous gifts?”

These questions always stopped me cold, because I could only provide examples of why the approach we used worked. I could not cite specific cases where these suggestions were attempted.

Now, five years after my retirement, in a faraway land, I have seen proof of what happens when people are invited to give what they wish by strangers, without any knowledge of who the donor is or what they could give. My insight came accidentally, as my better half and I drove through a small Indonesian island called Lombok, off the coast of Bali. In almost every village, we saw children holding out buckets to passing traffic, with an unfinished mosque standing nearby.

I asked our guide about this and he explained that the children were collecting money to complete the mosque. “How long does this process take?” I asked. “At least 15 or 20 years, and some never are completed,” he said, shrugging.

As we passed another skeleton of a building, I asked, “How long have they been trying to build this one?”

“At least since 1998,” he said.

“So the village elders who started the project will never see it completed in many cases,” I said. “That is true,” he nodded. “But the village has been here for hundreds of years and if it takes 20 or 30 more to build a new mosque, that is all right.”

“Isn’t there inflation involved, increasing the cost every year the mosque isn’t completed?” I asked.



“Of course. When they started building, the rupiah was at 2,500 to the dollar. A few years later it was at 18,000, making the initial donations almost worthless. Now the rupiah is at 9,400 to the dollar, and costs of everything have increased as well.”

“Aren’t there any rich people in these villages, people who might be able to make considerable gifts?” I asked.

“Of course. Some could give tens of millions of rupiah, but that would spoil the sense that the whole village is building this together. Allah belongs to everyone, not just to the rich.” He nodded again, justified.

Perhaps this is an important aspect of Lombok’s culture and society, but I came away convinced that in a society like that of the United States, this approach would be eminently unsatisfying. Projects would sit unfinished for decades, those most invested in them would die without seeing their dreams made real, and inflation would consume many of the early gifts. No one would be happy.

A scene at the opening of Seattle Art Museum’s Olympic Sculpture Park offered a different vision. On a snowy night in 2006, several hundred major donors gathered to celebrate their achievement. Led by the extraordinary generosity of a relatively small number of people joined by smaller gifts from thousands of others, the project had been completed on schedule and – considering rampant inflation in the construction industry – in a range close to the original budget. While the people in the room had provided the bulk of the money, they had inspired gifts by thousands of others.

The mood in the room was euphoric as the major donors congratulated themselves on succeeding at a challenge that had been the long-held dream of many of them. No one in the room *objected* to having been singled out as having the ability to make a major gift. They were proud of what they had been able to do for Seattle. For the most part, the attendees had requested specific gifts from others in the room, starting with the largest donor.

And now, the people in the room were closer to each other than before fundraising began; they had traveled together on an exciting and worthy adventure. They had raised a temple to culture from a brown field and it would be there to enjoy forever.