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### Utilizing Technology in the Solicitation and Stewardship of Donors

When reflecting on the last six months and the challenges we have navigated due to COVID-19, it became clear early on that the traditional in-person donor meetings and events were not an option for the foreseeable future. This realization led to an overhaul in the way we operate, a push for creativity and ultimately, finding a way to recreate the relationship-focused elements of our work through technological resources.

Our development team at Duke has used technology to improve and adapt our operations in a number of ways. One of the first and simplest changes made was to upgrade our method of delivery for gift agreements and endowment paperwork through Adobe Sign. This software gave donors the ability to sign pledge agreements and scholarship paperwork

electronically with the click of a mouse. This was incredibly simple but effective. The upgrade not only cut down on response time in closing gifts but it reduced the associated costs of mailing paperwork.

Upon recognizing that working from home was going to be a longer-term solution, we created a committee for donor engagement and communication. We first designed a year-long calendar of virtual events with the emphasis on connecting our donors with coaches, student-athletes and administrators. With many of the tangible benefits of giving not available this year, we wanted to highlight the core of our mission – the student-athlete experience. Through these events, we are able to provide access to our coaches and student-athletes through a video conference format. We can also filter the audience for each event by priority level and area of support.

Our most successful event thus far was a “Town Hall Meeting with Athletics Director, Kevin White.” We invited top-level supporters to hear directly from our athletics director on the state of Duke athletics and the financial implications caused by COVID-19. After the meeting, we scheduled personal phone calls with specific attendees and in response to the Town Hall, asked them to stretch their support this year. As

a result, our team raised over \$500,000 in a period of two weeks.

The next project utilizing technology will be converting the athletics annual scholarship dinner to a virtual format. The virtual scholarship event will provide our endowment donors the opportunity to have a one-on-one Zoom call with their student-athlete scholarship recipient. We hope this will serve as a friendly reminder to our donors why they give in the first place.

In all these new initiatives, one of our best resources has been getting buy-in from our coaches. They have quickly recognized the importance and opportunity in hosting Zoom calls with donors and former student-athletes of their program. This has allowed the coaches to engage at a high level with supporters, advocate for their program and rally for philanthropic support during this tough year.

While I’m sure there are many ways to utilize technology to serve our donor base, we have discovered that our best successes have come from bridging the gap between donors and Duke athletics. Just because the method of communication has shifted to Zoom or the virtual event world, we are still able to provide donors the opportunity to connect to our coaches, our programs and most importantly our student-athletes.

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## Joe Rafanelli

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### Navigating COVID: Lessons Learned

The year 2020 will be best known for the plan that never was, having planned for capacity reductions, postponements and cancellations. There has been lot of chatter about budgets, sustainability of the collegiate model and how athletics departments are going to stay afloat. With all this, I have started seeing the silver lining of 2020; to survive we must adapt, we must work together and get back to the basics.

No matter if you are in ticketing, marketing, or operations: we are ALL fundraisers right now. This collective mindset will ensure revenues in the short term and maximize future success through a team-centric approach.

But how can we possibly be successful as a

collective during a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic? Simple, get back to the basics and put the fan first.

### Be Empathetic and Flexible

We are all experiencing this pandemic just like our fans, how would you want to be treated if you were in their shoes? Create policies and procedures that provide flexibility to fans throughout their decision-making process. Don’t make it about the short-term gain; make it about the fan and what is in their best interest. Let’s end the days where “All sales are final” – provide flexibility and allow fans to make their own decisions.

### Be Transparent

Information has changed at a furious pace, making it impossible to get ahead of the next breaking news cycle. If there is a big news story, even if you don’t have all of the answers, acknowledge it. The unknown leads to apprehension, but silence leads to tension. Provide timelines and set expectations as to when the next communication will come out, even if that communication is providing the same information as before.

### Know Your Audience & Their Why

The traditional sales pitch, whether it’s selling a season ticket or making a major gift ask, has been about supporting the student-athlete experience. However, this blanket pitch may not resonate the same for you or me as it does with the alumni who sits in section 126. Identify guest segments using a data-based approach to draw conclusions as to their why and develop your communication strategy. Will this take much more time and effort? Yes, but the results are worth it.

### Don’t Be Afraid to Make the Ask

The biggest difference between high-performing and under-performing sales representatives is that they simply ask for the sale more often. We all do a fantastic job building relationships – don’t be afraid to make the ask! Fans love your university, your team, and your community; you will be surprised at the kind heartedness of many – allow them to help!

At the end of the day, there is no blueprint for navigating COVID. My best advice is to adapt, work together and get back to the basics. A collaborative nature and the relationships built today will help us bounce back even stronger in the future.