

# The Charity Runner's Playbook —Your Guide to Running for a Cause & Raising Real Money



*This newsletter was created from insights shared on a podcast featuring Robin White, Six-Star Marathon Finisher & \$30,000+ Fundraiser. For the full conversation and additional details, listen to the complete episode <[insert link](#)>.*

## Meet Your Guide

**Robin White** isn't just any runner – she's a powerhouse in the charity running community. Having completed all six World Marathon Majors and raised over \$30,000 for the Bell Center across 13 campaigns, she brings deep experience to charity fundraising. As an active volunteer with the Bell Center Service Guild, she understands both sides of the charitable giving equation.

In this newsletter, we're distilling her wisdom and community insights into actionable strategies for your charity running journey.

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## How to Get Charity Bibs

Most major marathons have two main paths: **general entry** (lottery or time-qualifying) and **charity entries**. On paper that sounds simple, but as Robin explains, each race plays by slightly different rules—and understanding those rules is half the battle.

### 1. Start With a Cause That Truly Matters to You

Before you think about forms and deadlines, start with your “**why**.”

Robin has primarily run for Birmingham’s **Bell Center**, often with a specific child in mind—her friend Kirsten’s son Quinn, or her best friend’s son Theo. For Tokyo, she stepped outside her comfort zone and chose **Plan International** because their “Run for Girls” mission aligned with her hopes for her own daughter.

Charities notice when your application reads like:

| “I picked you because you’re on the list,”

| versus:

| “Here’s why this cause is deeply personal to me.”

### 2. Learn How Each Race Handles Charity Bibs

Not every major works the same way:

- For races like **New York**, you can try the **lottery first**, and if you don’t get in, many runners then turn to charity partners. Local organizations (like Bell Center, KultureCity, Smile-A-Mile in Birmingham) often have a set number of bibs each year.
- **Tokyo** is different. There, the **charity selection happens before the general lottery**, and it’s more like a **bidding process**. You commit to a fundraising amount, and the charity considers both your bid and your written “**why**” when deciding who gets a spot.

The takeaway: check the charity process for each race instead of assuming they all follow the same “lottery first, charity after” pattern.

### **3. Be Concrete About Your Fundraising Commitment**

Charities need to know you’ll actually hit your target.

Robin:

- Researched **past bid amounts** for Tokyo by finding a spreadsheet of previous years’ charity bids and number of spots.
- Set a realistic ceiling for what she was truly willing and able to raise.
- Felt confident because she had a track record raising money for the Bell Center.

When you apply, go beyond “I’ll raise the minimum” and briefly outline:

- What amount you’re committing to.
- Where that money is likely to come from (workplace, community, events, merch).
- Any prior fundraising you’ve successfully done.

### **4. Write a Strong “Why I Want to Run for You” Paragraph**

For Tokyo, Robin’s charity considered not only her bid but also a short written statement. She wrote about being a single mom, wanting her daughter to have every opportunity, and why “Run for Girls” genuinely mattered to her.

Later, in a Tokyo Facebook group, she saw someone who had **bid more than she did** but wasn’t selected. That reinforced her belief that the *story* matters—not just the number.

Your application paragraph doesn’t need to be long, but it should be:

- Specific (what in your life connects you to this cause?)
- Honest (no generic “I’ve always admired your work” fluff)
- Clear about why you want to represent *this* charity at *this* race

### **5. Reach Out Early to Charity Partners**

For races like New York, some charities already know they'll have bibs **before** the general lottery even opens. Robin recommends reaching out early to organizations that regularly have entries—especially local ones.

Why early contact helps:

- You get a **longer runway** to fundraise.
- You're on their radar as someone genuinely interested, not just scrambling after a lottery rejection.

Think of yourself less as a random applicant and more as someone starting a relationship with the charity.

*For detailed timelines, fundraising minimums by race, and application deadlines, see our comprehensive Major Marathon Charity Guide <insert link>.*

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## Proven Fundraising Strategies That Work

In our conversation with Robin, six themes came up again and again. Together, they form a simple playbook you can adapt for your own charity race.

### 1. Educate People About Your Cause

Robin didn't just drop a donation link and hope for the best. She spent time **learning about the organizations** she ran for and then sharing that with others.

As she put it, she really felt that "*getting the education out there about the organization was making a difference.*" When people understand what the charity actually does—and who it helps—they're far more likely to give and to feel good about it.

**How to use this:**

- Learn a few meaningful facts or stories about your charity.
- Share those in your posts, emails, and conversations—don't just say "please donate."

### 2. Make the Ask Simple and Low-Friction

A lot of runners are nervous about asking for money. Robin totally gets that: “*No one likes to ask for money.*”

Her approach is to **make the ask very simple**:

- Clearly explain what the money is for.
- Invite people to give a small, concrete amount—like **\$5**—instead of a vague “donate whatever.”
- Release the pressure: if people can’t or don’t want to donate, that’s okay.

Her line captures it perfectly:

“If everyone reading this donated \$5, that would make a huge difference.”

**How to use this:**

- Use one clear number (“\$5” or “\$10”).
- Pair it with a one-sentence explanation of your cause.
- Let people know there’s no guilt if they can’t give.

### **3. Give People Something in Exchange**

Robin also gets creative with **merch and small items** so supporters feel they’re getting something fun in return:

- She designed **“Run the Ham”** shirts (Run Birmingham → Run the Ham) and sold them to raise money.
- Around Valentine’s Day she followed up with **“Love the Ham”** shirts.
- She’s also done **pompom beanies** (“little hats”) tied to her fundraising.

It’s still a donation—but it feels more like buying something cool from a friend.

**How to use this:**

- Create a simple shirt, hat, bracelet, or sticker tied to your race or city.
- Make it clear that a portion (or all) of the price goes to your fundraiser.

### **4. Host Events That Create Value and Community**

One of the earliest efforts Robin saw was a **silent auction party** hosted at a friend's house: people donated items, gathered, and bid—and the evening turned into a fun social event *and* a successful fundraiser.

Events like this work because they:

- Give people an excuse to gather.
- Make giving feel like a shared experience, not a solitary transaction.

**How to use this:**

- Host a small gathering: a silent auction, movie night, or themed party.
- Ask friends and local businesses to donate items or services.
- Charge a simple entry fee or encourage bids, with proceeds going to your charity.

## **5. Don't Underestimate the Power of Your Workplace**

One thing that surprised both of us: **your workplace can be a fundraising goldmine.**

In the running community, people are generous—but there's also **fundraising fatigue** when everyone is asking at once. Your coworkers, on the other hand, may:

- Not be getting hit with as many donation requests.
- Be excited to support a colleague doing something hard and meaningful.
- Have access to **company giving programs** or nonprofit funds.

In the episode, we talk about examples like workplace bake sales and employers with nonprofit arms that contribute additional funds.

**How to use this:**

- Ask if your company has a **nonprofit fund or matching program**.
- Run a simple bake sale, lunch, or casual Friday fundraiser at work.
- Don't forget your spouse/partner's workplace too.

## **6. Take a Moment to Acknowledge Each Person Individually**

Finally, Robin's most beautiful habit: she **thanks every donor personally**.

She says she always takes a moment to thank each person individually—and even when someone donates anonymously, if she can figure out who it is, she still reaches out privately.

For her, it's not just about the dollar amount:

She thinks about how that person's donation impacts the organization, her fundraising,  
*and*

#### **How to use this:**

- Send a quick DM, text, email, or handwritten note to each donor.
- Tell them specifically:
  - "Here's what your donation helps do," and
  - "Here's why your support means so much to me personally."

This turns donors into long-term supporters who want to see you succeed—both in your fundraising and at the finish line.

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## **Community Recognition**

This wisdom comes from the generous sharing of **Birmingham Track Club** members who contributed their experiences and insights. Special recognition goes to **Jamie Lane Trimble**, the BTC President who encouraged this research, and **Rachel Bouley**, whose workplace fundraising strategies have become a model for others.

Currently fundraising members include **Jason Zajac**, who's pursuing the Tokyo Marathon opportunity, along with **Kat Nichols** and **Chris Campo** working toward their goals for the NYC Marathon. **Ruth Kles, Joey Saffold, Haley Flannery, Allison Hoover, Rebecca Williamson**, and **Katie Pirkle** all contributed valuable lessons from their fundraising journeys.

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## **Key Takeaway**

Remember: Charity running isn't just about the miles or the money – it's about community, purpose, and the joy of running for something bigger than yourself.

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## Resources

A comprehensive Major Marathon Charity Guide is coming soon, featuring application deadlines, lottery versus charity entry strategies, fundraising minimums by race, and a complete timeline cheat sheet.

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**Happy Running & Happy Fundraising!**

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