

Morning Brew | Joanne Davidson

## Davidson: Recession a too- easy excuse to say no

By Joanne Davidson  
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When the recession passes, unemployment will decrease, the stock market will rebound, real estate sales will pick up — and a whole bunch of people will have lost the best excuse they've had in a long time for weaseling out of things.

"The recession is being used as a way to lie to people, by people who are too cowardly to face a problem directly," says Martha Wadsworth, an associate professor in the University of Denver's Department of Psychology.

Like the young professional who wanted to switch from one expensive hairdresser to another, but lacked the nerve to tell her present stylist the truth. So she claimed she had been laid off.

"I said my department was being eliminated and

that I'd be going to Cost Cutters until I could get back on my feet. There were hugs and tears and I swore I'd be back, even though I knew I wouldn't because I've found someone I like better."

"Obviously, a white lie here and there isn't a big deal, but if you are firing someone because their work is a problem, they need that feedback," Wadsworth says. "Saying that it is because of the recession is doing them a disservice."

Leaders of charitable organizations have their suspicions, but no real proof, that wealthy patrons aren't being truthful when they claim their net worth has been decimated to the point they can no longer afford even a single ticket to a fundraiser they'd supported in years past. Results from a survey conducted in February by the Colorado Nonprofit Association lends some credence to those fears.

It found that half of the organizations queried have had at least one major donor cite the recession as the reason for cutting back, or eliminating, his or her charitable giving.

"It gives people a built-in excuse," admits Steve Edmonds, executive director of the Institute for Children's Mental Disorders and a fixture on Denver's fundraising circuit. "If someone tells me they can't buy a ticket to my event because their portfolio has taken a big hit, what am I going to say? 'Show me your taxes?' "

The chair of a \$200-a-ticket benefit taking place in the fall says she was "stunned" when a longtime contributor told her he couldn't support

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her this time around. "His salary is public record, and so when he suddenly insists the 'tenor of the times' precludes him not just from buying a corporate table like he had done for the past several years, or even a pair of tickets for him and his wife, I was absolutely stunned. Then I see his name in the paper a few days later for having been at another, more expensive, event. So I guess all I can do is tell him I'm sorry he's hurting and that I'll look forward to seeing him again when the economy bounces back."

Three workouts into her new membership at a local athletic club, Nancy realized she'd made "a terrible mistake" and wanted nothing more than to void her contract and explore other options for the exercise she needed to complement the weight loss she'd recently achieved.

"I guess I hadn't paid close enough attention during the tour I was given before I joined, because literally from Day One, the whole vibe seemed off. I didn't like the people, the equipment or the hours."

The contract she had signed appeared to be iron-clad, with no easy outs. The \$45-a-month membership fee wasn't exorbitant, so Nancy, a stay-at-home mom married to a corporate vice president, considered letting it expire without ever going back. "Which," she reflects, "probably would have been the honorable thing to do. But with 10 months left on a 12-month contract, I didn't want to be reminded of my bad decision every time the Visa statement came and there'd be the monthly charge."

So she "stewed and stewed" for weeks until it hit her: The recession! It was the perfect excuse.

"Every day I'd be hearing about people who, if they're not out-and-out losing their jobs, are having to take pay cuts . . . sometimes really big pay cuts."

So she cooked up a tale about her family's economic woes and pleaded her case to the membership director. "I described how humiliating it was to come to her like this and spoke very sadly about how there'd be no more luxuries until I found a job."

It worked.

"Am I glad to be out of the contract? Yes. Should I have fibbed about our personal economics? Probably not. But at the time, all I could see was that capitalizing on the recession was the only excuse that would fly."

Rationalize them as you wish, advises Rabbi Eliot Baskin of the Jewish Family Service Rafael Spiritual Healing Center, but the fibs and excuses made in the name of recession aren't fooling anyone.

Especially the Man Upstairs.

"The secret of living is giving," Baskin declares. "Today, especially, we should be more concerned about living our values, not leaving our valuables."

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