

# **The Tee Shirt Works**

By Kirk Loudon

## **About the Author**

*Kirk Loudon is a partner at NextLevel Thinking, a marketing strategy firm that successfully blends emotion, education, and enablement into a marketing approach and framework for your organization that can be effectively communicated internally to your employees and externally to your current and potential customers.*

*Kirk is a veteran in the marketing and advertising business. He has been a creative force in the southwest market for over 18 years. He has worked in all areas of the business.*

So the local blood center decided to print some new tee shirts for the next big drive of the month. The employees are getting excited because they get a chance to take a look at the new designs that have been created by Number One Tee Shirt Company of Florida.

“I think we should do a big blood drop with a smiley face”, says Carol, a twenty-year employee at the local center. “Everybody loves the smiley blood drop”.

That fact is, not everyone loves the smiley blood drop. Your donors are happy to get the shirt...they smile and say thank you, but as soon as they get home it goes in a drawer that has been set aside for shirts to be used for washing the car or sleeping in. It is time to take another step back and re-evaluate the reason for the tee shirt in the first place.

For the first year that we were in the blood business, we fought to have blood centers stop handing out tee shirts to every donor. We would do seminars on how handing a donor a gift for a single donation was rewarding them for behavior that we do not want them to do. One donation equals a tee shirt...what motivation do they have to come back if they already have the prize?

One of our speaking engagements was very interesting in that we discussed the fact that tee shirts are not the best way to go. We presented our case and shared our point of view of rewards for the second or third donation but not the first. Everyone in the room was nodding in agreement and taking notes. We thought we were really making headway.

So we decided to take a short break. My partner left the room to take a phone call and I stayed behind and...well I eaves dropped! I began listen to the attendees during the break.

The first conversation was a woman talking on the phone to her donor center in another state. She was telling them that the lecture was really informative and that she was learning a great deal on changing how we view donors...and this is where I had to bite my tongue.

The very next sentence out of her mouth was placing an order for...that's right; you guessed it, the smiley face blood drop tee shirt. Not just a small order, she was purchasing 2,000 shirts! That's a bunch of blood drops!

People let me be clear; I am not against tee shirts. As a matter of fact that is pretty much all I wear...well pants too. I felt I had to clarify. The point is, if you are going to use a tee shirt as a reward, first make sure that the donor is doing exactly what you want them to do before they get the shirt. And second, make sure that they wear it!

Take a trip to the local mall and scope out the tee shirts that are being sold. Do you see any smiley blood drops? I think not. What you will see are some very cutting edge shirts that are being sold at a premium. Some of the designs are going for as much as \$100 per shirt. \$100...who pays that? Believe it or not, the shirts fly off the shelf. These new graphic tees are so popular that you can now get knock offs at the neighborhood department store.

The designs do not have to be blood related. Make them say what you want but in a fresh way. Tattoo graphics, Fleur-De-Lis images, artistic typefaces...get creative.

What we are getting at is give the people what they want. Go online and get examples of what you think is a good design and show it to your tee shirt printer or your in-house artist. Have them come up with some ideas that are similar.

We work with a blood center in Texas. This center was doing what every other center was doing when it came to tee shirts...smiley blood drops. We were asked to come up with a few new designs for their tee shirts. At first they were a little uncomfortable with the idea of doing something outside of the box. After all, they have been doing it the same way for 30 years.

The first tee shirt was for a radio station. The promotion lady at the blood center got the call almost instantly. They were so pleased with the design that they wanted us to repeat the look for the station's own promotions. Since then they never looked back.

It used to be that I would see a blood center tee shirt every couple of months when I was out and about. Now I see three or four at the gym, a couple in the grocery store, some on the golf course. My son says he sees them in school as well.

So after 10 years in this business I am happy to report that the tee shirt does actually work...as long as someone is wearing it.

Remember...when it comes to giving shirts, get out of your head and into the donor's. A gift worth getting is worth doing something for!!!