Charity

I Gave at the Office

Once people open their front door to someone seeking money for charity, the "social-pressure cost" of saying no is $1.40 to $3.80, a study concludes. More than half of all face-to-face donations are basically payments to avoid social embarrassment, researchers say.

In 2008, the researchers fanned out to nearly 7,700 households in towns surrounding Chicago. Sometimes they just knocked on doors and asked for money for a local charity or an obscure out-of-state one. Other times they left a flier telling residents when they would be back the next day, or a different flier alerting them to the return visit but letting them check a box to opt out.

When people were warned of a second visit and could opt out, doors opened 23% less often, with donations falling 28% for the local charity, 40% for the out-of-state charity.