



## Going Overboard?

By Vadim Liberman

Naturally, you've never cheated on your taxes. Well . . . there was that one time. But it wasn't *cheating*, really—just a tiny omission, not a big deal. Even your accountant said so. Still, if you're feeling a twinge of guilt about taking advantage of our nation, don't worry. Just give some money to the government.

One way to wash your conscience clean is to send cash—or stamps, or scissors, or pencils—to the Treasury Department's Conscience Fund, which has received stranger items. Established in 1811, the fund accepts gifts from individuals who feel that they've wrongly acquired or withheld money from the government, as well as contributions from people anxious to ease their conscience from wrongful acts committed against others. While the average donation is approximately \$100, last year the fund received about \$263,000, deposited into the Treasury as "miscellaneous receipts."

"The Conscience Fund gets cash, checks, all kinds of stuff," claims Wanda Rogers, director for financial accounting and services at the Treasury's Financial Management Services. For example, one woman's brother had taken a pair of scissors from the government. After he'd passed away, the woman felt guilty, so she sent in a check for \$25 to clear her conscience. Rogers has also received a box of old tools, binoculars, a 31-piece silverware set originally belonging to the Navy, and other peculiar gifts. Reads a letter from a donor: "Over 10 years ago, I worked at the National Bureau of Standards at Boulder, Colo. . . .

Level E: If you just cold-mailed the plan to the VC, you will have to call at least six times before the secretary will consider calling you back. You may need to stalk her at the grocery store.

A powerful plan with a crisp summary has the power to make a VC pick up the phone and call you, even if it was cold-mailed out of the blue. But don't bank on it. And some investors want to see a little hunger for the deal on the side of the managers involved. They know how much you'll have to push to make it a reality and want to see these traits in their first interactions with you. Of course, after the seventh call, you probably want to take the hint and give up. Tenacity shouldn't turn into harassment, and you may have another, better idea to float by these investors someday. ♦

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as a clerk typist. Over a period of time at that job, I took home with me pens, pencils, typing ribbons, a stapler, and a beat-up dictionary, and a few other supplies. I wish to make restitution now. I only hope you will forgive me and accept this check as payment for the things I took." (Rogers has no record of the check's amount.) Other notes: "Please accept this money for two postal stamps I reused." "A dollar bill appeared in my pocketbook yesterday, and, just in case, I'm sending a check for a dollar to replace it." If you plan on donating to her fund, don't worry, consoles Rogers. The government does not investigate, trace, or pursue guilty givers.

Even if your conscience is clear, you can still give to the government by writing a check to the Treasury Department's Bureau of the Public Debt, which gets between \$1.5 and \$2 million annually, with most gifts under \$100. "There are two things that generally motivate people to give," explains spokesperson Peter Hollenback. "One is concern about the debt, and the other is this notion of wanting to give something back to the country. One case that particularly struck me was a bequest in the high-five figures from somebody who emigrated from the Baltics sometime in the 1920s. He said, 'I want to give a little something back for the freedom and dignity this country afforded me.'"

Yet another way to help out the government financially is by giving to the "Gifts to the United States" account. Established in 1843, it accepts unconditional, general donations, which the federal government allocates as it sees fit. Last year, donations totaled \$394,000; the average gift was about \$500.

"Most people, of course, feel that they've already 'contributed' enough money to the government through taxation. They see government as too big and having too much money and not using it as effectively as it could," explains Eugene Miller, assistant director at the Center for the Study of Philanthropy. But, on the other hand, if Uncle Sam is like most people, can he really have *too much* money? ♦

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