

# Gotcha!

## *How high-pressure groups push for new members*

*Learn to recognize high-pressure tactics that threaten your independence*

By Guy Robertson

You interest me. You really stand out in a crowd. Let's talk.

No, I'm not selling software or used cars. I belong to a group that's looking for new members. You might call it a religious group, and some people say that we're a cult. That does not matter. Nor should you care when campus authorities accuse us of deception and high-pressure tactics. Do I look dishonest to you?

Save your questions for later. When you get to know us better, you'll realize that questions aren't necessary. You've heard lots about the usual religious groups on campus, how they encourage you to ask questions and find out more about their beliefs. But they don't give you the answers that my group provides. We have all the answers you need. Our meetings can be long. Sometimes we hold weekend workshops, during which you can become kind of tired. Exhausted, in fact. And hungry, and isolated. Not to worry: we do your thinking for you. And soon you won't have trouble believing anything we tell you.

Let me ask you about yourself. Are you feeling lonely and out-of-place? Sure you do. This is a big university, and occasionally everyone feels vulnerable. You don't have your usual circle of friends to talk to, and why would anybody want to call Mum and Dad? Except for money, of course. Do your parents have money? How much? And how much do you have in your bank account right now? Just a few harmless little questions...

Perhaps there's something else in your life that's troubling you. Has a close friend or family member died recently? Are you missing somebody special back home? Tell me about your love life. Are you having difficulty meeting the right person on campus? That's rough. Those Friday and Saturday nights get lonely. I'll bet that you're sick of the library. And the pub is too noisy, and you don't feel like going to a movie by yourself.

It's frustrating to see everybody else in residence enjoying themselves, while you're left all alone. That's a shame. And maybe you're having trouble with your courses? Math is brutal, isn't it? And perhaps you're not doing

as well in your English course as you had hoped. Those exams sound pretty scary right now, don't they?

Of course there are lots of people on campus you can talk to. The usual suspects! The Chaplains' Association and the Residence Life staff, Speakeasy and Counselling Services. But they can't offer you what I can. Nor can International Student Services or the Women Students' Office. And you can forget the Student Health or the Equity office. Forget them all. They tend to get in my way, and I demand all of your time and attention.

By the way, how much money can you withdraw from your bank account per day? Do you have a line of credit? And what about the limit on your credit cards: can you come up with \$2500 if you need it? You see, membership in our group involves a few expenses. Not that we're exorbitant. It's just that we need you to show that you're as serious about us as we are about you. And one way to do that is to make a donation. Or you can simply sign up for our weekend workshop, which includes everything you need. No, I won't tell you anything more about the workshop. You'll find the answers to all of your questions when you arrive.

And you'll make so many new friends! We guarantee instant friendship with attractive people that are just like you. You'll never feel lonely again. You'll work closely with these people, and become very familiar with our divinely inspired book. The Bible? Yes, we study it. We might study other books as well, the right kind of books, the only books that you really need to find your way in this life. Save your questions for later.

Our group will give you all the answers you want, and a lot more. We expect a few things in return. First, we'll want to know more about you. Personal things. Sure, some of the details are embarrassing. You might feel guilty about them. You might not want anybody else to know about what you've done in the past, but you'll have to share those secrets with us. And we won't tell anybody, unless you let us down. You won't ever let us down, will you?

Secondly, we'll need lots of your time. The closer you get to us, the more time you'll spend with us. We might ask you to volunteer for one of our membership drives. You'll spread the word about the benefits that we offer to anybody who wants to join. And despite the fact that we offer the most important message that anyone can receive, there's

resistance to our way of thinking. It takes time to break down barriers. You'll work hard to bring in new members, and to persuade them to part with a few dollars. But how important is money beside God's divine revelation? How important is somebody's time on earth when we show them Eternity?

Once you believe in us, finding new members won't seem so hard. You'll see somebody who looks interesting, and you'll want to introduce them to the group. You'll want to share with them all the wonderful things that you've learned at the workshop. Some day you might even become one of our Guides. The training to become a Guide is expensive, but consider the importance of the job and you won't worry about the cost. Didn't you tell me that you have an overdraft as well as lots of room on your Mastercard? That's just what I want to hear.

Finally, we'll need your commitment. We expect you to dedicate yourself to our sacred cause. That means that you don't ask too many questions. That means that you don't challenge the authority of our Leaders. And above all, that means that you put our group ahead of everything else in your life. We'll become more important to you than your parents and old friends back home. You must leave behind your old beliefs, and replace them with what you learn from us. And you must remember that what we'll give you is far more valuable than anything this university offers. What do you care about calculus, anyway? Will you really miss Shakespeare and Sociology and dissecting frogs in the Biology Lab? Not likely.

Since we'll become the focus of your life, we won't want you to stray. We expect you to show up for every meeting and absorb what we tell you. We don't want you to start taking advice from outsiders, since they work against us. We have enemies who would shut us down if they could. So we protect ourselves. Anybody who deserts us could be shunned, or worse. Deserters can come to a bad end. After all, you don't rebel against a Divine commission, do you? That's not smart.

And now, I'd like you to sign up for our next workshop. A cheque would be fine, and I'd like your Mastercard number and expiry date, along with your address and telephone number. There's no need to check us out. I'd advise you against going to the Chaplains' Association or the Residence Life staff, since they're not on side. Look, you're not going to cause problems, are you?

Wait, we haven't finished yet. I've told you about our group, and I expect you to make a commitment. You refuse? You can't have better things to do. All right, go. There's always somebody else to take your place, somebody unhappy, looking for help, away from home and new on campus. Somebody with lots of money, who won't ask questions. Somebody interesting, who stands out in a crowd.

### **High pressure groups are constantly looking for new members.**

Their representatives approach prospects in a variety of ways:

- Striking up a conversation in a cafeteria or coffee shop
- Offering invitations to "social events" without indicating a host or sponsor
- Passing out vaguely worded brochures with invitations to meet a mysterious and exalted leader or teacher
- Passing out questionnaires, "personality tests", and flyers promising answers to eternal mysteries
- Sending e-mails describing parties or exclusive weekend getaways
- Offering assistance and fast solutions to personal trouble, declining faith, loneliness, substance abuse and academic problems
- Promising instant friendships

High pressure groups have no legal powers of coercion. They cannot force you to give out personal or financial information. They have no right to restrict or monitor your movements or relationships with other people. Above all, they cannot force you to join them.

If you feel that you are being intimidated or harassed by any group on campus, contact any of these campus resources:

#### **Campus Resources**

Chaplains' Association 224-1614

Residence Life office 822-5779

International Student Services 822-5021

Speakeasy 822-3700

Women Students' Office 822-2415

RCMP 244-1322

Counselling Services 822-3811

These resources will answer your questions in a straightforward manner. They will advise you regarding any threatening situation or attempt to restrict your choice. They are well-experienced in dealing with high-pressure groups of all kinds, will act in your best interest, and respect your choices.

Don't hesitate to call them.