

Fundraising Tip: Ditch the Pitch Habit #1 – Think Input Before Output

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[Today's article is the second article in the exclusive *eJewish Philanthropy* series designed to acquaint readers with the key concepts in Steve Yastrow's new book, "Ditch the Pitch", which was published last week. The message is clear: tear up your fundraising pitch, and raise more money with fresh, spontaneous persuasive conversations. You can find the first article [here](#).]

by Steve Yastrow

Did you ever notice that some people are able to respond to situations with the perfect comment or action? What enables them to be so quick on their feet?

Although it's tempting to say that people are quick on their feet because they're smarter, I don't think this is the primary reason. I believe that people who are quick on their feet focus on "input before output." Their in-the-moment responses (their output) are based on what they observe or hear (their input.)

Being quick on your feet is critical when you are persuading another person, whether you are in a fundraising situation or in another setting where you are trying to get someone to say "yes." You can never predict everything you need to learn about a donor and her situation; you need to ditch the pitch and be flexible based on what you hear and observe as your conversation unfolds.

This leads us to Ditch the Pitch Habit #1: **Think Input Before Output**. Let's explore this habit, and how to use it to make yourself a better persuader and a better fundraiser.

Let's face it; most people look at fundraising solicitations and other forms of persuasion more as processes of telling and convincing than as processes of listening and observing. They rehearse their pitches and create their PowerPoint presentations, then work diligently to tell their donor everything they planned to tell her. This is not an effective way to raise money, because the odds that a preconceived pitch will be right for the donor you are trying to persuade, at the moment you are trying to persuade her, are about one in a billion. To *ditch the pitch*, we first need to shift from an output-driven to an input-driven mindset.

Believe the answer will be there

You can develop the confidence to *ditch the pitch* and improvise your fundraising solicitations if you trust that the right course of action will become apparent to you during the conversation you are having with a donor. I interviewed many improvisational actors and musicians while writing *Ditch the Pitch*, and every one of them told me that listening, observing and paying attention are the key factors that enable them to improvise. As author and spiritual teacher Ram Dass said, "the next message you need is right where you are." Yes, *ditching the pitch* might seem a little bit scary, but the best antidote for this fear is to trust your skills of perception.

Here are three practices that will help you develop the habit of thinking input before output.

Practice: Be alert

We all have many things to think about and a lot to be distracted by. Paying attention during a persuasive conversation is critical for success. When you are persuading a donor, shut out all possible distractions. If you are on the phone, don't look at your email or web browser. If you are in a busy place, such as a restaurant, try to shut out all extraneous noise. If you are distracted by other things going on in your life or work, do your best to put those issues aside while you are with your donor.

Put yourself in a curious mood, genuinely interested in learning things about this donor that you didn't previously know. And remember what Ram Dass said, the next message is right where you are.

Practice: Say less to notice more

Every moment you are speaking in a persuasive conversation with a donor is a moment you are not listening to, and learning from, your donor.

My goal as a persuasive conversation starts is to get the other person talking more than me. This enables me to hear many cues from this person that will help me navigate the conversation. It opens me up to discover possibilities for persuading them that I may not have thought about previously.

Practice saying less and see how much more you notice. Be frugal with your words and discover how much less you need to say to be successful in a fundraising situation. You may be surprised to discover how much more engaged donors will be in conversations with you.

Practice: Turn down your analytic brain

Thinking too much can kill spontaneity. Don't overanalyze everything that happens, because when you get inside your head, you won't be paying attention to what's going on around you. Don't judge yourself, don't judge your donor, and don't do mental calculations about the odds of closing this solicitation. Turn down your analytic brain.

Yes, it's impossible to completely turn down your analytic brain, but you can keep it at a "low hum" in the background while you are *thinking input before output*.

Like all habits, practice helps us get better, a little at a time. This week, focus on these practices, and steadily improve your ability to focus on input before output. This is a key step to ditching the pitch and improving your fundraising performance.

In our next issue, we'll explore Ditch the Pitch Habit #2: **Size Up the Scene**.

Through January 28th, amazon.com is offering a special \$3 discount on Ditch the Pitch. eJewish Philanthropy readers can use this link www.yastrow.com/amazon-promo/ to take advantage of this discount. For more information about Steve Yastrow and Ditch the Pitch, please visit www.yastrow.com.