

Fundraising Tip: Ditch the Pitch Habit #3 – Create a Series of “Yeses”

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[Today’s article is the fourth article in the exclusive *eJewish Philanthropy* series designed to acquaint readers with the key concepts in Steve Yastrow’s new book, “Ditch the Pitch.” The message is clear: tear up your fundraising pitch, and raise more money with fresh, spontaneous persuasive conversations. To read the previous articles in the series, click [here](#)]

by Steve Yastrow

We all love it when a donor says “yes” and agrees to a gift. But this “big yes” is rarely the only yes you hear. Securing a gift is actually a series of “yeses.” Let’s explore why, and how, by exploring Ditch the Pitch Habit #3: Create a Series of “Yeses.”

A key theme of this article series is that if you deliver pre-written pitches and presentations to donors you won’t have much success. Fundraising effectiveness requires you to *ditch the pitch* and engage donors in improvised persuasive conversations.

Conversation is much more engaging and interesting to donors than is listening to a pitch. However, conversations are fragile. One moment two people can be having a good dialogue and, suddenly, if one of them chooses to disengage from the conversation, the discussion can lose its momentum. Conversational momentum continues when the people talking with each other agree to fuel that momentum by continually affirming their participation in the conversation. Every conversation is a series of “yeses.”

Here are some practices to help you create a series of “yeses” in conversations with donors.

Practice: Say “yes, and ...”

One of the primary techniques that improvising actors use on stage to create spontaneous scenes is called “yes, and ...” No matter what one actor says or does, the other improvising actors affirm it and build upon it, essentially responding with “yes, I agree with what you have offered me, *and* here is my addition to it.”

You can do the same thing in your donor conversations in order to create a fresh, spontaneous conversation that will interest and engage a donor. As you speak with donors, look for ways to acknowledge, affirm and agree with what they say, responding in ways that build upon what you have heard. Even if the technical answer to a question from a donor is “no,” with practice you can avoid using dialogue-deflating words like “no” or “but,” instead acknowledging what the donor has said and finding something you can say yes to.

Practice: Work with what you are given

Donor conversations rarely unfold exactly as planned. You will always encounter surprises, sometimes undesirable surprises, such as when a donor expresses a lack of interest in your organization, and starts a conversation by telling you about his current financial challenges.

As with most things in life, resistance is not always a productive response to unexpected or undesirable situations. We don’t have to like a situation to acknowledge its presence, and by acknowledging a situation, we have a much better chance of dealing with it.

When a donor presents you with an unanticipated situation, this new situation becomes the material of your conversation. It is what you have to work with. Don’t resist it; say yes to it.

Practice: Ensure your donor keeps saying yes

In addition to you saying “yes” in your donor conversations, mutual agreement also requires that your donor continues to

say “yes” as well. If you lead your donor to a place where she says “no,” the conversational momentum can stop just as quickly as if you had said “no.”

Here are a few tips to help you avoid hearing “no” from your donors during persuasive conversations:

- Don't assume anything. Before making a statement, be careful that it won't put your donor into a defensive mode. If you're not sure, ask. Don't tell.
- Don't prescribe a solution too early. Your primary job in a persuasive conversation is not to impress your donor with solutions; it is to move your relationship forward. Only prescribe specific recommendations when you are confident that your donor is ready to hear them.
- Keep the conversation focused on your donor, not on what you are trying to persuade your donor to do. Make the conversation about their connection with your organization, not only about your organization.
- Avoid yes-or-no questions. Phrase your questions, when possible, as a choice between yeses, i.e., “Which of these two options seems better to you?”

When you look at a conversation as a series of “yeses,” you keep your conversations moving forward. And conversational momentum is an important piece of successful persuasion.

Remember, the “big yes” comes after a series of “yeses.” When you can create a series of “yeses,” you will go a long way to increasing your fundraising effectiveness.

Focus on these ideas, and in our next issue we will explore Ditch the Pitch Habit #4: Explore and Heighten.

For more information on Steve Yastrow and Ditch the Pitch, please visit www.yastrow.com, or find Ditch the Pitch on amazon.com.