

Fundraising Tip: Ditch the Pitch Habit #4 – Explore and Heighten

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[Today's article is the fifth 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

In our last article, we discussed how to *Create a Series of "Yeses"* in a conversation with a donor. When you and your donor are engaged in a dialogue of affirmation and agreement, you have set the stage for a successful solicitation. To achieve this success, your next challenge is to take the conversation to a higher level by using Ditch the Pitch Habit #4: Explore and Heighten.

First, let's define what we mean by "explore" and "heighten."

- To "explore" when you *ditch the pitch* is to find the things your donor really cares about.
- To "heighten" is to create a rich dialogue about the things your donor really cares about.

When you explore and heighten, you will engage your donor deeper into a conversation he cares about. If the donor really cares about the conversation he is in, he is much more likely to listen to you, and to give money to you.

Let's discuss three practices that will help you Explore and Heighten in your donor conversations.

Practice: Find your donor's path

Sales pitches, PowerPoint decks and brochures all follow a set communication chronology, laying out their stories in an order that seems logical to their creators. However, this isn't always the order that would make the most sense to the person receiving the communication.

Your donor will be more likely to open if you find the conversational path that is most interesting to him, without forcing him onto the path that makes the most sense for you. For example, if a donor wants to start a conversation by talking about one of your least exciting programs, one that you rarely talk about in donor meetings, don't resist this topic – talk about it! There must be a reason he wants to discuss this program, and by exploring this topic with him you may uncover some of his key motivating factors. Additionally, discussing the topic he wants to talk about will engage him deeper in the conversation and encourage him to open up more and share more information with you.

Practice: Get rid of your but

Exploring and heightening is a delicate process of navigating a conversation to a place your donor cares about, and doing it in a way that reveals important information that will help you move your relationship forward. As we discussed in our [last article](#), the word "no" can stop a conversation dead in its tracks. Similarly, the word "but" can slow a conversation down as soon as it is uttered.

As you explore and heighten in a conversation, avoid using the word "but" at all. When donors hear this word from you, they will perceive that you have disagreed with them, and this can disrupt the flow of the conversation. To avoid using the word "but," you can either substitute the word "and" or just leave a pause where the "but" would have been.

Practice: Make accidents work

As you are exploring and heightening with your donor, you will inevitably hear things that you weren't expecting, many of which may be disappointing, such as news that your donor has new, competing philanthropic interests, or that he is experiencing financial challenges this year. Once you hear these things, don't let them faze you; they are the new reality

of the conversation and they are new facts that you need to explore and heighten.

Improvisational actors have a concept called “every idea is a bridge to the best idea.” What this means is that “we can always get there from here.” No matter what you hear from your donor, accept it and use it as the place from which to navigate the rest of your conversation.

You may have heard the adage that people don’t buy drills because they want drills, but because they want holes. Sometimes, people want things for the impact they have on their lives.

As you are talking with a donor, try to discover the higher-level personal reasons the donor would want to give to you, beyond how noble the work of your organization is. Does his family have a personal experience in the past needing the kind of services your organization provides? Is he looking to model good charitable behavior for his children? Is he interested in the social status of a board position? When you discover the higher-level reasons that would interest a donor in your organization, you have an opportunity to connect with you donor on an important, personal level that can make your organization much more relevant to this donor.

Focus on these ideas this week, and in our next issue we will explore Ditch the Pitch Habit #5: Focus the Conversation on the Donor.

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