

Fundraising Tip: Ditch the Pitch Habit #5 – Focus the Conversation on Your Donor

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[Today's article is the sixth 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

Your organization does important work. When someone donates money to your organization, they are making a smart, effective contribution to making the world a better place.

The challenge: Communicating with current and potential donors in a way that helps them believe that your organization is important, special and unique.

Your donors live in a world where they have a staggering number of choices available to them every day. They can buy the things they need at many different stores, they can choose to eat in a wide variety of restaurants, and they can choose to contribute their charitable giving to any of thousands of organizations. The result: People see these choices as being interchangeable. It's hard to differentiate your organization from the rest.

But, at the same time people frequently see the choices of where to direct their money as interchangeable, there is something they see as unique: themselves.

Here's my suggestion for dealing with this conundrum: Imagine every donor you speak with is thinking this: "If you want me to think you're different, show me you understand what makes me different."

In other words, don't try to impress a donor by explaining the features and benefits of your organization. Seek to understand what drives an individual donor – her motivations, interests, challenges, lifestyle, goals – and then connect your organization's story to your donor's story.

This is the essence of Ditch the Pitch Habit #5: Focus the Conversation on Your Donor. When you have a conversation about the donor, instead of making a presentation about your organization, you gain the interest of the donor while also learning what she really cares about. Below are three practices that will help you Focus the Conversation on Your Donor.

Practice: Make 95% of the conversation about the donor

No matter how much a donor cares about your organization, she cares about herself more. And, she understands herself better than she understands your organization. If you have a conversation with her in which 95% of the subject matter is about herself and her interests, you will have her full attention and engagement, and she will be much more open to making the connection between her interests and your organization.

Practice: Obey the one-paragraph rule

It's easy to "get on a roll" when talking about your organization and deliver a long monologue. Don't! You will lose your donor's attention. Instead, obey the one-paragraph rule: As soon as you have spoken about one paragraph's worth of information, stop and leave a break.

Many important things can happen during that break: The donor can ask a question. The donor can absorb what you have just said. You can see if the donor is interested or disinterested in what you just said. You can discern whether it is time to ask for money, or if more conversation is needed.

Practice: Weave your stories together

As you are having a conversation that is focused on the donor, you will inevitably find opportunities to weave parts of

your story into this donor-centered conversation. For example, imagine you are raising money for a Jewish day school, speaking with a grandparent of current students, and during the conversation the prospective donor reveals his frustration at not being able to understand the Hebrew in synagogue services. He says that he hopes his grandchildren will never have that disappointment. This is a perfect time to weave information about your immersive Hebrew curriculum into the conversation, in a way that is much more effective than if you had mentioned this feature of your school out of context. Hearing about the Hebrew language program as he is discussing his own personal situation makes the program much more relevant and meaningful to him.

When you focus the conversation on your donor, you will find it much easier to gain and hold the donor's attention. More importantly, it will be easier to help your donors see how your organization's work fits into their personal goals and interests.

Practice these ideas, and in our next issue we will explore our final habit, Ditch the Pitch Habit #6: Don't Rush the Story.

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