

Listening and Questioning Skills for Fundraisers

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founded 1782—the first college in the new nation

***“All man’s life among men is the struggle
for the ear of another.”***

--Milan Kundera

The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Sources

- *Karen E. Osborne, Principal, The Osborne Group*
- *Listening, the Forgotten Skill: a Self-Teaching Guide* by Madelyn Burley-Allen (1995)
- *The Seven Powers of Questions* by Dorothy Leeds
- *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* by Deborah Tannen, Ph.D. (1990)
- *Listening Quiz developed by the Institute for Charitable Giving and used with permission of William Sturtevant*

Introductions

- What do you hope to come away with today?
- What challenges do you face in your donor visits?
- What skills do you want to build?

In a major gifts visit, what do we listen for?



What do we listen for?

- Thoughts on your institution: attitudes, disappointments, connections, loyalties, aspirations—STORIES
- Work, mission,
- Values
- Family and obligations
- Philanthropy and giving interests
- Involvement preferences
- What else?

What do we listen for?

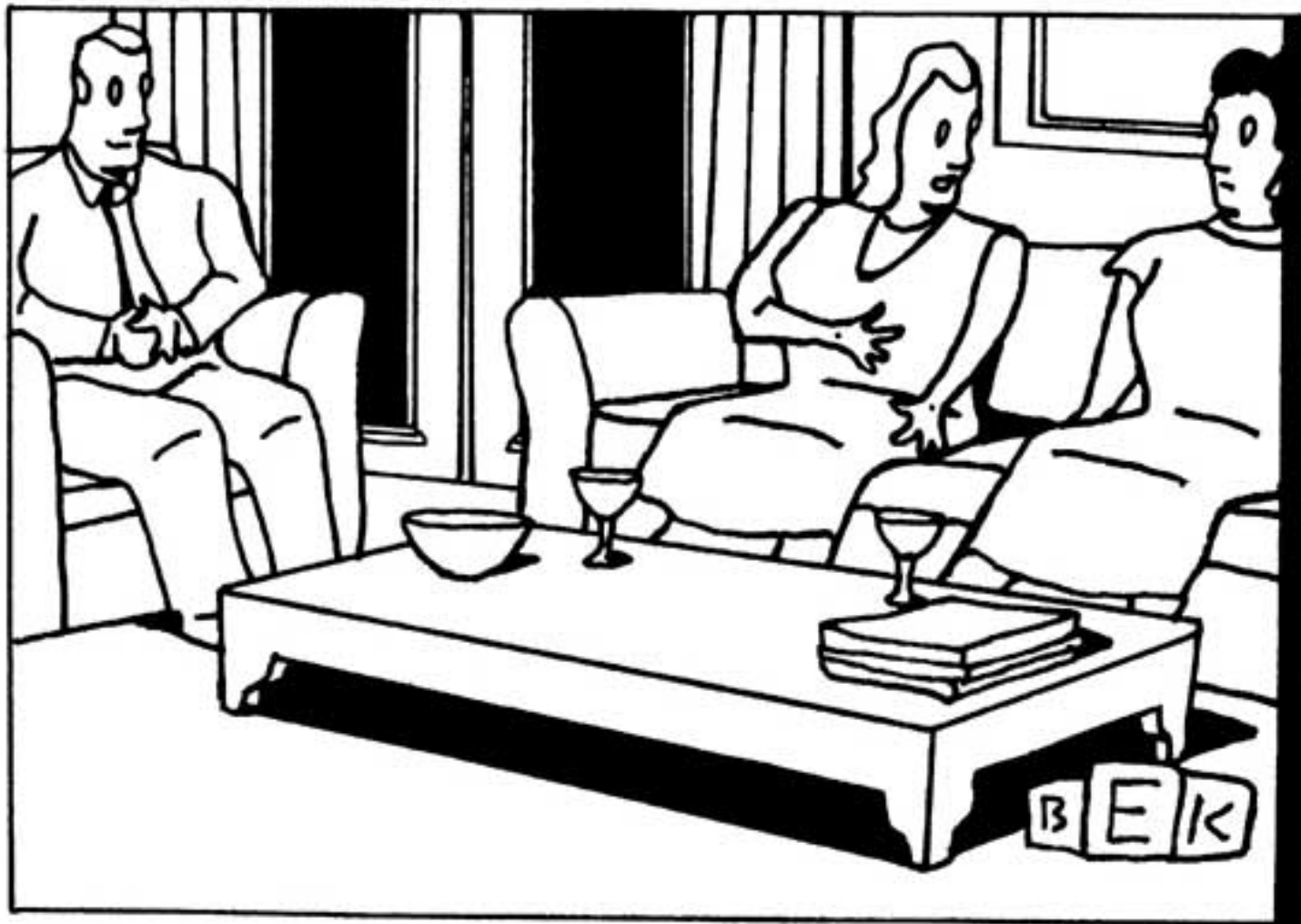
- Clues about...
- The right amount—income, assets
- The right purpose—the dream
- The right natural partners and solicitors
- The right time—and approach
- The right gift vehicle—fears and needs

(The Four and ½ Rights courtesy The Osborne Group)

A great major gifts fundraiser...

- ...serves in “the Understanding Business”
(Zung Nguyen '77, WC Alumni Citation Award recipient 2009)
- ...does not make the work mechanical
- ...realizes the donor’s relationship to the institution is a cable, and we are each but one strand. *(Dave Dunlop, Cornell U)*
- ...has finely tuned hearing
- ...is both sensitive and brave.

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"Sometimes I think he can understand every word we're saying."

Are you a good listener?

- Most fundraisers excel at presentation.

Effective listeners:

- Concentrate
- Find best information
- Defuse stress; help the talker think the issue through
- Build powerful relationships

Functions of good listening

- Takes in information while remaining non-judgmental and empathetic
- Acknowledges the talker—but not in a distracting or artificial way
- Invites communication to continue
- Carries the person's idea one step forward

"Listening is a magnetic and strange thing. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand. Ideas actually begin to grow within us and come to life."

--Brenda Ueland, If You Want to Write

How can we improve?

- Understand *all* components of good listening
- Learn which ones need work
- Commit
- PRACTICE

Levels of listening

- 3: SPORADIC listening, PRETEND listening
- 2: HEARING WORDS, but not grasping or seeking hidden meaning
- 1: EMPATHETIC, QUESTIONING, reflective listening

GENUINE active listening

1. Strong eye contact
2. Suspend judgment; genuine empathy
3. Full attention (filter distractions)
4. *Appropriate* mirroring, head movement
5. Ask clarifying and confirming Q's
6. Ask open-ended Q's
7. Seek advice...and really listen to it

Specific listening skills

- Focus on relationship, mutual interest
- Involve vs. present
- Help vs. win
- Elicit vs. impose
- Solve vs. avoid
- Evaluate vs. judge

Courtesy Karen Osborne, The Osborne Group

Specific listening skills, cont.

- Seek to understand feelings
- Capitalize on thought speed: summarize
- Pace yourself with the donor
- Don't "crowd"

Take the listening quiz (10-15 minutes)

- Think of a specific setting and grade yourself on how you do there. (e.g. with prospects; with your boss or employee; or with a family member.)
- Be brutally honest
- What did you learn about yourself?

5 listening strengths/weaknesses

1. Concentration
2. Acknowledgment
3. Research
4. Sensing
5. Structuring
6. And I would add...memory, retention

Barriers

- *The belief that speaking = power*
- Your judgment about the speaker
- Jumping ahead, assuming
- Distracting internal dialogue
- Memorizing in the moment
- “Yes, but”: the need to solve or rescue
- High emotion (positive or negative)

Approaches to common problems

- *Understand that learning = power*
- Summarize to check your comprehension
- Ask if you may write notes to ensure full follow-up
- Make active listening a priority in ALL settings
- Seek feedback on your listening skills

Understanding conversational style

- Rapport talk vs. Report talk
- Interrupting is not always intended as infringement. Consider the content: reinforcement? contradiction? change in topic?
- **High considerateness vs. high involvement speaking styles**

Courtesy Deborah Tannen, Ph.D.

Group work (10 mins)

- **Pair up to discuss a topic**
- What was it like to be the high-considerateness speaker in this pair?
- What was it like from the high-involvement viewpoint?
- What does your conversation partner need to do or know?

Honor gender differences in conversation

“Judged by the standards of women, who look at each other when they talk, men’s looking away is...a means of avoiding connection. But if boys and men avoid looking at each other to avoid combativeness, then for them it is a way of achieving friendly connection rather than compromising it.”

Courtesy Deborah Tannen, Ph.D.

The 7 Powers of Questions

Dorothy Leeds

Questions:

- ...demand answers
- ...stimulate thinking
- ...give us valuable information
- ...put you in control (use this wisely)
- ...get people to open up
- ...lead to quality listening
- ...get people to persuade themselves

Closed vs. open questions

Closed: saves time, but ends discussion

- Here is why I've come. Is that OK?
- Is this a convenient time to discuss this?
- This is what we thought you wanted. Were we correct?
- So you are saying that you can't afford to donate this asset?
- When might we have your decision?

Open: how, what, could, tell me...

- Tell me about your family business. How do you make it all work?
- What other options might be possible?

What are your favorite questions to ask a prospective donor?

- Are they open- or closed?
- Do they presume too much?
- How might you modify your questions for best results?

Strategic questions

Courtesy of Karen Osborne, The Osborne Group

- How did you come to choose Washington College?
(How did your child choose us?)
- What were some of her best experiences here?
What is she enjoying most?
- Do you believe we have a strong case for support?
Why or why not?
- Do you feel good about the gifts you make to
(name)?
- What is the best gift you ever made? Why is it
satisfying?

Strategic questions

- I noticed you haven't given in a number of years. *What changed for you?*
- Your civic engagement is impressive. How do you juggle the competing demands of your and your children's institutions?
- How is the economy affecting you and your business?
- Under what circumstances might you be willing to make a stretch gift to a charity?

Strategic questions

- **Would you consider including The American University in your estate plans?**
- What factors go into your philanthropic decisions?
- Would you be willing to review an alumni list and help us identify or engage others?
- How could we make our campaign case more compelling?

Action plan

- Work on your questions. Practice asking them without grilling or sounding like an interviewer. Beware getting too comfortable, too rote.
- Commit to work on your listening. Check in to see how you are doing.
- Watch and emulate the best listeners you know
- Reap the rewards of giving the gift of deep listening