

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS FOR GETTING TO KNOW YOUR SUPPORTERS

by Julie Whelan Capell

Contrary to popular belief, extroverts do not necessarily make the best fundraisers. Why is that? Because the most important skill in fundraising is LISTENING.

Why is listening a fundraising superpower? Because the heart of what you are trying to do when you are raising money is connecting the donor's values to the work of your organization. Memorizing your organization's elevator speech and blurting it out every chance you get isn't getting you any closer to understanding your donors and potential supporters. Bombarding people with the wish list of things your organization needs, or talking nonstop about outcome measures and metrics won't build a relationship.

LISTENING is what is called for because only by listening to and connecting with people can you begin to understand WHY they might want to donate. Everyone has their own personal reasons for being interested in your organization, and those reasons are usually connected to their values.

A good fundraiser needs to be able to ask questions and then shut up and listen to what the other person says. You need to listen deeply in order to get to the core values underlying what the person is saying. Only then can you begin to talk to them about ways your mission connects to their values.

So rather than memorizing the organizational mission statement or a list of accomplishments, try thinking of 4 or 5 open-ended questions you can ask people when you meet them at special events or meetings or after religious services. Closed-ended questions result in "yes" and "no" answers and should be avoided. Open-ended questions generate discussion. They often begin with "what" or "how" or "tell me about."

Questions About the Donor

1. How are you connected to this event?
2. Where did you go to school?
3. How have the past couple of months gone for you?
4. Tell me about your pets
5. Where were you born?
6. How did you get where you are today?
7. What do you love about what you do for a living?
8. Tell me about this [piece of jewelry they are wearing] – usually has a personal story behind it
9. Tell me about your hobbies
10. What were the most important lessons you learned from your parents?
11. If you could solve one problem today, what would it be?

12. If you won the lottery, how would you spend your time?
13. Are you planning any trips/been on any trips recently?
14. What are you most proud of?
15. What are you most passionate about?
16. If you could leave one lasting legacy to the world or the community, what would it be?

Questions Asking for Advice

1. What do you think about (*insert whatever issue you are working to address*)
2. Please give me your guidance on (*insert whatever issue you are working to address*)?
3. Can we brainstorm this idea?
4. What do you think I (we) should do?
5. How would you handle this?
6. Tell me more about that. (Not a question, but powerful anyway.)
7. What other organizations do you believe effectively address (*insert whatever issue you are working on*)?
8. What do you believe would most transform (*insert whatever problem you are working to address*)?
9. What results are most important for you to see from our work?
10. What could we be doing better?

Questions About Giving

1. What philanthropic gifts have brought you the most joy in the past? What was it about those experiences that were so joyful?
2. What donation/gift has given you the greatest sense of fulfillment?
3. What influences your giving?
4. What are your top three giving priorities?
5. What are your expectations of the nonprofits you support?
6. Why do you give, and what do you want to achieve by giving?
7. Why do you give to our organization?
8. What do you think about our organization?
9. What interests you most about our organization?
10. Which of our programs do you find most compelling?
11. Why does (*insert the cause you work on*) matter to you? Why now, in particular?
12. Why did you first give to us?
13. What interests you most about our organization? What areas are less interesting to you?