




Just Tell Me What You Want –  
Answers to the Unexpected  
Things Prospects Say

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Joy Myers, Arlington Food Assistance Center  
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**Presenter – Marshall Ginn**

- Founder, Capital Development Strategies
- Vice Chair, Annual Giving, AFP Foundation for Philanthropy
- Chair, Selection Committee, Washington Post Award for Excellence in Nonprofit Management
- Former Board Member, AFP/DC

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**Presenter – Joy Myers**

- Director of Development, Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC)
- AFAC is a community-based food pantry in that provides fresh, healthy food to 2,200 families in-need each week.
- \$2.6 million annual budget

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## Asking is No Easy Business

- Fun or frenzied / exhilarating or exhausting – this is complicated
- People + Passion + Money + Conversation = ?
  - *WHO THE HECK KNOWS WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN?*

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## Two Points to Bear in Mind

- If we've followed good fundamentals – they will know why you're coming and are in most cases ready to be asked.
  - But they are busy and can get a little impatient
- If a prospect accepts such a meeting, it's not a matter of whether or not, but rather how much.
  - They are ready and expecting this; another reason to be prepared with a response to "Yes."

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## Four Different Angles

- FIRST
  - Using these moments as tools to learn more about the prospect
- SECOND
  - Addressing ways to quickly formulate an "emergency" ask when you thought it was just going to be a cultivation visit.
- THIRD
  - Responding when the prospect says "Yes" too quickly, develop steps you can take to lay the groundwork for future gifts.
- FOURTH
  - Understanding how you can redirect the conversation to get back on your track.

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**REACH THE PEAK**  
BRIDGE CONFERENCE

## Scenario One

- You're meeting with a prospect, you set it up a few weeks ago, and you were very clear that your purpose was to talk about the campaign and to bring him up to speed on several key projects already underway at your nonprofit.
- You're sitting there in the prospect's office. You've gone through the introductory pleasantries. You've thanked the prospect for his time. You've even had the opportunity to start talking about some recent achievements at your nonprofit of which you – and the board – are very proud.



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**REACH THE PEAK**  
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## Scenario One

- All of a sudden, before you can even transition to the role that the campaign is going to play, the prospect politely interrupts you and says, "That's sounds great, just tell me what you want."



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**REACH THE PEAK**  
BRIDGE CONFERENCE

## Learn More About the Prospect

- Keep them talking
  - "Tell me more ... about what most interests you about this project"
- Ask them the same question
  - "What do *you* want for this project?" (or our community? our organization?)
- Ask for advice/perspective
  - "What I really need today is your (reaction, advice, guidance, willingness to talk again)"

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## Learn More

- Read the situation and make some on-the-spot interventions
  - What's the emotional state of everyone in the room? *especially the prospect*
  - Are the right people in the room?
  - Is the vibe just not right? There are ways to look for an exit strategy.
  - Awkward moments
- Take this feedback and use it for future learning [#Bridge15](#)

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## Scenario Two

- Your prospect is a very busy business leader. You've arranged a meeting, sure that everyone understood this was just an opportunity to talk about the project, the need and the campaign. About 2/3 of the way through the meeting, the prospect, after looking a little impatient, says that this sounds really terrific, but she's leaving town for several weeks to oversee the opening of a new facility across the country, so there will be no way that she can do a site visit. 

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## Scenario Two

- It's dawning on you that you're not going to be able to see this prospect face-to-face for a long time, and she was rated as one of your top prospects. You don't want to waste this opportunity. 

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## Emergency Ask

- Prepare and practice in advance.
- Coordinate with your solicitation team member.
- Suggest a clear course of action.
- Don't freeze up! Sometimes the script has to be tossed!

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## Emergency Ask

- "We would like you to join the other community leaders who've already shown their support by making a gift to this campaign. I know you care deeply about this issue, and I want to make sure you have the opportunity to play a part. Can we count on you to do something special?"
- "This effort is going to require meaningful stretch gifts from us all, and I hope you will agree that this project is critical. I've gone the extra mile already, which is why I'm taking the time to talk to leading citizens like you. What I would like is for you to consider joining me in making a sacrificial gift to this campaign."

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## Going Off Script

- Who has a great "emergency ask?"
- Who has been able to equip their volunteer leaders with such a resource?

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### Scenario Three

• Your solicitation visit is going very well. It's the leadership phase of the capital campaign, you're targeting gifts of \$10,000 and greater. You feel like your prospect has been rated carefully, but you felt that she was at the bottom end of the leadership gifts category. You finally get to the point where you ask the prospect to consider a gift of \$10,000 to the campaign, and she says, "Yes, no problem, we'd be delighted," before you barely get the ask out of your mouth.



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### Scenario Three

- You get the sense that the ask was way too low.
- Is that it for this prospect?



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### Lay the Groundwork for Future Gifts

- Don't forget annual giving. "We hope that you will consider this gift as an addition to your generous support of our Annual Fund."
- Ask about multi-year giving. "Thank you for being able to make a gift so quickly. Would you be in a position to make a gift like this for perhaps 2-3 years in a row?"
- Offer them the opportunity to serve as a volunteer solicitor.
- Promise to keep them informed.

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## The Pre-emptive Yes

- Prospect says “yes” usually over the phone so they don’t have to do any more thinking about a gift.
- Might seem like a relief to the volunteer solicitor, but it’s not good for an upgrade campaign or for deepening a relationship.
- Use a pre-emptive response, such as “Thank you, that’s fantastic, I can make this even easier for you by having you join our monthly donor society...”

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## Scenario Four

- You and the prospect have discussed the campaign’s goal and its underlying projects for about 20 minutes, and over the course of the conversation it’s become clear that the prospect has not read the materials sent in advance, and he’s got a key point turned around in his head that is actually opposite from the way it’s done at your organization. While not angry, the prospect finally breaks in and says, “This doesn’t really add up to me, if ABC is going on, then why do we need this major capital campaign. That’s an awful lot of money! I just don’t get it.”



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## Scenario Four

- It’s clear that it’s time to find an opportunity to regroup and refocus the conversation back on the facts and back on your strategy.



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## Redirect the Conversation

- Step in to clarify points. “Oh I’m sorry, perhaps I’ve been unclear...”
- Watch for clues that they’re not “plugged in” to the conversation or on the same page.
- Say “thank you” as a way to break up the conversation. Do not underestimate the power of simply saying “Thank you.”

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## Redirection

- “This project is important, and I think it will be worth your time to learn about its components plus I would really appreciate your feedback. Are there elements that I can put into context for you?”
- “Before we go on, I want to clarify a few points, for perhaps we’re not on the same page; I want to give you every opportunity to understand ... I would hate for us to be on different tracks and both be dissatisfied with the outcome of our conversation.”
  - Don’t be afraid to probe some of their concerns a little bit. You might learn what the prospect really feels about the project.

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## Redirection

- When in doubt, thank them for their enthusiasm.
  - “Thank you for sharing that perspective.” “Thank you for being so enthusiastic.” “Thank you for helping us to know what makes you excited about this effort.” First of all, they should stop for a second and respond to your saying “thank you” and it will make them reflect a little on the conversation at hand.
- Just that simple pause can be just the thing to pull it all back to where you wanted it to go. Thanking them can put you back in control of the flow.

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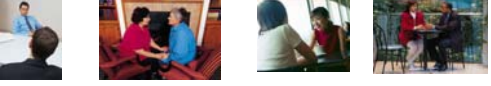
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## Conversation

- Tell us YOUR story about a donor visit that got off track.
- What would have done differently had you thought about it in advance?



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## Solicitation Meetings are Challenging

- Managing the EXPECTATIONS of you and the donor
- Managing the EMOTIONS of the moment
- Managing the UNEXPECTED, because you just never know what's going to happen

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## Thank you

- Practice these skills the next time you visit a donor.
- Tell a colleague about what you've learned today!



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Thank you again. Make sure you tell us what you thought – complete an evaluation!

Don't forget to visit the *Solutions Showcase!*  
*Many of the ideas discussed today are on display at the Solutions Showcase!*



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