



Great Pick-Up Lines: Getting Personal Visits

In major gift fundraising, it's all about visits. Visits are where you can build a relationship. And relationships are the key to getting a major gift. But getting visits is not so easy, especially when we anticipate rejection. After all, our prospects know why we're calling and, we assume, probably don't want to be asked for money.

But not every visit is about money. In fact, some visits shouldn't be. Visits can be for learning about the prospect's interests, finding out about their other philanthropy, understanding what they think about the organization and its mission, talking about a vision for the future, building trust, and learning what kind of impact they hope to have on organizations with which they are involved. When we learn these things, it is much easier to figure out how they might be able to help with their time, their expertise, and, eventually, their money.

First, you've got to get the visits to build the relationships that lead to major gifts. Getting visits is a little bit like getting dates. There is high potential for rejection, but the benefits are worth the risk.

Here are some "pick-up lines" that have worked for me and other development professionals when trying to get visits with current donors.

1. **The Preemptive Promise:** "I won't bring up money unless you do." (Once you make this promise, you've got to keep it.)
2. **Stating the Obvious:** "You're already a donor. You know how to give to us. I want to talk about where we're going and, possibly, get you to react to some new ideas." (If you use this one, you must be prepared with new ideas to review.)
3. **The Report:** "I'd like to come and talk about the impact of your current gift and how it has affected our students/clients." (In the course of the conversation, you can ask questions that advance the relationship.)
4. **Asking for Advice:** "We're getting ready to launch a new initiative and would benefit from your perspective." (For this one you need to consider, in advance, how your donor's perspective is relevant and useful. Is it because of their professional expertise? Or is it because you are targeting an audience that is significantly similar to them?)

In new relationships, asking for help is one of the best ways to engage potential donors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people who are asked for help end up giving more money than people who are asked for money. This follows the well-known major gift fundraising principle that **investment follows involvement**.

So, what kind of help do you need? Most nonprofits have challenges that go beyond the most obvious fundraising needs. If we can focus on other needs while we're networking and building relationships, we will find people who mesh with our mission and their interest in us will grow. Giving will be a natural next step.

Here are a few examples of "pick-up lines" that can be used with new friends:

1. "I'm on the board of the Da Vinci Science Center in Allentown and we are networking to grow the impact of our organization in the region. I know that you are well connected in the corporate community here in the Lehigh Valley. Would you consider meeting with me and allowing me to pick your brain about other people we should be talking to?"
2. "I'm on the board of a women's choir in Brooklyn and we are networking to build our board. I know that you are well connected in the New York arts community. Would you consider meeting with me and allowing me to pick your brain about people we should be talking to?"
3. "We are networking to build our base of volunteers...."
4. "We are networking to identify local experts who can help us to address a (physical plant/legal/technology) challenge we're having...."

Once you get the visit, it's important to try to make the most of it. I'll tackle some "dos and don'ts" of first visits in another article, "Not On the First Date!"

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