Conversations of Consequence

Our aim should be to always pursue conversations of consequence with donors and prospects. Our goal is to make every conversation a conversation that matters, of impact, of consequence. We seek to do so because we recognize that time is precious for those with whom we engage. It is our responsibility to prepare thoroughly and thoughtfully out of respect for them and our organization.

We respect them because they have agreed to meet with us because of the missions of organizations we represent. Our organizations matter in this world and we hope matters, or will come to matter, to those with whom we visit. **We have a responsibility to develop donors and help them reach their full potential as philanthropists.** We do that through meaningful interactions, transactions, stewardship and knitting them to our organizations. Then, over time, they may grow as donors and grow in attachment to our organizations and satisfaction in their relationship to us.

It is vital that we understand where we are headed when we embark in a conversation of consequence. We can accomplish this by preparing thoroughly. What are the next steps we foresee that we would like to take this prospective donor through? Write them down. As we prepare, think about, then define the goals of the visit. What do we hope to accomplish in the meeting? What do we want to learn about the prospect's attitudes and circumstances? What do we want to better appreciate about them so that in our subsequent interactions we can continue to develop them as donors? Select questions thoughtfully. Bear in mind how we might steer the conversation to make it a conversation of true consequence. Such conversations can be of consequence for the prospect as well as of consequence for us and our organizations.

Seek a location that's private, that's quiet, where an uninterrupted engagement can occur. It is critical to have the right environment in which to have a conversation that truly matters. Not that long ago, I reached out to a donor and requested a meeting. The donor invited me to meet with him on behalf of his family. He was a CFO of a mid-size, growing company in the food industry. He told me that he had a conference room at his office that would be quiet so that we could have a private conversation. That appealed to me as I was going to better assess the capacity and the inclination of this donor. We hardly got into the conversation when he pulled out a comprehensive financial spreadsheet that summarized the full financial commitments and planning of his family. I was astounded by this act of trust and disclosure. He explained to me that they were a family that tithed.

He described the current philanthropic commitments that they were fulfilling. He relayed that one of their children required significant support due to health reasons. Because of these circumstances he indicated they were unable to do a major gift at that time. This conversation of consequence gave me considerable insight. I determined that proposing a planned gift would be the direction we should take when it was time to solicit.

Conversations of consequence require exceptional listening, smart questions, genuine interest in the person, and thoughtful, meaningful follow up.

Prepare thoughtfully. Meet in an environment that will support the engagement. Then do the work of engaging in a conversation of consequence that matters to the donor, our organizations and ourselves.