

An Abstract on AEL as a Fundraiser's Relationship-Building Tool

Tanya Drollinger

Abstract Building a relationship with a major gift donor is an important form of fundraising for a nonprofit because the financial gift is large, and it is generally a more effective use of solicitation of dollars than short-term low-dollar amount contributions (MacMillan, Money, Money, & Downing, 2005). When this strategy is employed, the role of the fundraiser becomes that of a relationship manager tasked with building trust and developing mutual goals with the donor through effective communication. Over the past decade, the emphasis on building and continually nurturing the relationship between major donors and nonprofits has been prominent in the literature (Burnett, 2002; Schervish, 2005). The importance of good communication and particularly listening on the fundraiser's part is widespread through major donor case studies but tends to be anecdotal in nature rather than treated as an important construct that deserves empirical investigation from a fundraising point of view (Breeze, 2011; Burnett, 2002; Schervish, 2005). In the fundraising literature, only one study has empirically investigated the role of listening as a part of good communication between the nonprofit and donor, and it was found to be positively related to higher levels of trust and nonmaterial benefits (MacMillan, Money, Money, & Downing, 2003).

A key to developing healthy long-term relationships in B2B sales has been directly linked to effective listening by the salesperson. More specifically, when salespeople effectively listen, buyers are more likely to trust them, perceive higher levels of relationship quality, and ultimately are more likely to buy from the salesperson in the future (Drollinger & Comer, 2014; Pryor, Malshe & Paradise, 2013; Ramsey & Sohi, 1997). When salespeople are poor listeners, buyers tend to rate their relationship quality lower as well as levels of trust, and they also indicate less intention to work with them in the future.

Burnett (2002) and others have encouraged fundraisers to adapt best practices from marketing to fundraising. In this paper active empathic listening will be employed as a possible method that if used by fundraisers will help them in their

T. Drollinger (✉)
University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Canada
e-mail: tanya.drollinger@uleth.ca

efforts to connect in a meaningful way with major donors. Getting to know the major donor through the practice of active empathic listening or AEL is proposed to enable the fundraiser to work with more accurate information regarding the donor's motivations, interest, and desires as well as instill a sense of trust and genuineness between both parties. The purposes of this paper are to outline active empathic listening (AEL) and explain the impact that the use of AEL will have if it is used and what may go wrong if it is not used in the major gift decision-making model (Knowles & Gomes, 2009).

References Available Upon Request