

AFP Central PA Chapter
Vignette Program Presentation
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“Flexibility”

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Principle: In the book, *Official Fundraising Almanac* by Jerold Panas, Panas shares a list of 88 criteria (in no particular order) – skills, talents, characteristics, and attributes – that defined the characteristics necessary to be a great fund raiser. “Be flexible” was number 33 on the list.

Vignette: I believe that one of the greatest skills that can make a fund raiser successful is the ability to be flexible. Being flexible has pulled me through many difficult situations. This is my version of making lemonade out of lemons. It seems like our profession can throw a lot of “lemons” our way.

There may be other skills that would be deemed to be more important, but how often do we have to have to respond to situations with flexibility? Changing circumstances may be out of our control, but by being able to bend (not break) and adjust is key. There are so many things that we experience on a regular basis. For example, equipment malfunctions, missed deadlines, a donor’s personal situation, changing priorities, and volunteer issues sound familiar, don’t they?

Flexibility means adapting. If you don’t adapt, you could be missing valuable opportunities. You may schedule a solicitation visit after appropriate cultivation and research, make the “ask”, and have your prospect turn you down flat. Shocking, ok, but through your skill of being flexible, you know that this particular “no” may be a “no, not now.” Recently, I was meeting with a retired Fortune 500 CEO and a seasoned fundraising volunteer to develop a plan for making a series of solicitations. He shared a story of a well-known area philanthropist who was a longtime personal friend. He mentioned that he had a perfect record with the individual – when it came to soliciting that person, he was 0 for 4. The point is that no one scores every shot, makes every basket, and no one gets a yes on every ask. If we did, there’d be no challenge and no motivation to improve. Flexibility means taking a deep breath and reassessing the situation to see how you can salvage it.

My friend here, Gumby, knows something about being flexible. The key to flexibility is being able to stretch (sometimes in many different directions all at the same time) without breaking. Flexibility gives us the ability to juggle several projects and stretch to meet goals all while remaining calm and collected.

So what happens when we come unglued and can’t adapt? I’ll tell you – we look bad. Have you been in the presence of someone that gets frustrated easily or maybe overreacts? If he or she would’ve have stepped away from the situation and used flexible thinking they have been able to respond differently.

Look – bad things happen. It's how we deal with the bad and transition it into the good that makes all the difference. Flexibility, patience, quick thinking, and a positive attitude will help you make lemonade and grow in this profession.