

I'm Listening
By Vicki Thompson, CFRE

As many of you already know, in my other life I write murder mystery novels, which is usually very different from being a non-profit fundraiser. But sometimes my two worlds will connect quite unexpectedly—and not because I murder someone in order to get their bequest for my organization!

A couple years ago, I was researching séances for a book I was writing. I hope there are no true believers here today, because I have to tell you that séances and the people who do them are all complete phonies. People who claim to be psychics are just people with a good understanding of human nature who also know a few tricks of the trade.

One of these tricks that I learned has turned out to be a valuable tool for donor relations, and now I'm going to share it with you. Research has shown the when you have a conversation with someone, you will remember 80% of what you said but only 35% of what the other person said.

This is the way it works with a psychic:

Psychic: I see the letter J.

You: That must be brother John.

Psychic: Yes, yes, your brother John. You haven't seen him in a while.

[This is purposely vague. Chances are every one of us hasn't seen our siblings in a while, which could be anything from a week to several decades.]

You: That's right! I haven't seen him for almost ten years, not since our mother's funeral. We had a terrible fight and we haven't spoken since!

This goes on with the psychic giving cues and you picking up on them and elaborating. And because you did most of the talking in this conversation, later you will tell your amazed friends about it and how the psychic told you all about your brother and how you had an argument at your mother's funeral and hadn't spoken for ten years, yada, yada. This is because you remember what YOU said, not what the psychic said.

As humorous as this is, it is also a good object lesson for fundraisers. Our natural instinct, when visiting a donor or a prospective donor is to tell them all the many wonderful things our agency does and all the many reasons why they should support it. The problem with that is the donor will remember everything HE said, but very little of what YOU said to him.

So how do we make this principle work for us the way psychics do? It's very simple. Instead of telling the donor about the work you do, ask the donor to tell you what he knows about your work and why he started giving to you in the first place and why he continues to give. Let the donor convince himself, and after you're gone, he'll tell all his amazed friends about the wonderful work your agency does and why they should support you, too.

And if you do this, I predict you will have success.