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**Asking Better Questions:
Deepening Donor Relationships**

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ReGina Newkirk Rucci
Managing Principal,
Edge Over Solutions
The Development Dept.

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Take a Moment
If your top donor left tomorrow, would they know why they mattered to you?

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Why Does This Matter?

- Donors don't just give to organizations; they give to their passions, to make an impact, and to make connection.
- Strong relationships = increased donor retention + larger gifts
- The depth of your relationships begins with the quality of your questions.



Tailored plans.
Transformative results.

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Think About It



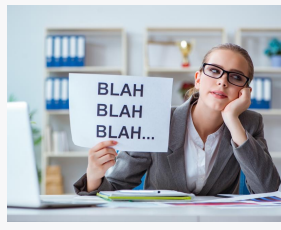
Your board chair wants to introduce you to a new donor who loves the type of work of your organization. She's new in town but has a net worth of over \$200 million. She can meet with you in her office for 30 minutes. Think about what you will prepare to say to her and what kinds of questions you will ask.

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Common Pitfalls

- Talking too much about the organization
- Asking surface-level or transactional questions
- Rushing to the ask
- Not actually listening

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The Shift

- Pitching → Discovering
- Informing → Understanding
- Assumptions → Curiosity
- Transaction → Relationship



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Transformative results.

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What Makes A “Better” Question?

- Open-ended (not yes or no)
- Donor-centered, not organization-centered
- Emotion paired with meaning, not just facts
- Invites storytelling
- Appeals to how donors see themselves, not just what they care about

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The Five Types of Power Questions

- Values – What matters to them?
- Story – What experiences shape them?
- Impact – What change do they want to see?
- Engagement – How do they want to be involved?
- Identity – Who are they in the overall story?



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Let's Revisit This Conversation



So, let's see how this conversation might play out with this new reframing and types of questions to ask.



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Some “Go-To” Questions You Can Use

- What inspired your first gift to us?
- What issues are you most passionate about right now?
- What does meaningful impact look like to you?
- How do you like to engage beyond giving?

Take the time to understand how the donor fits in your story.



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But, Wait! There's More: Follow-Up

- Tell me more about that....
- Why is that important to you?
- How did that experience shape your thinking?

Deeper relationships come from the second and third questions...



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The Five-Layer Onion

Pair up. Decide who Partner A and who is Partner B.

Partner B, you need to get to something meaningful only using follow-up questions.

What's your favorite snack?





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The 70/30 Rule

Donor talks 70% of the time; you talk 30%. Don't fear the silence.





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Listening > Asking



- Do not just wait for your time to talk.
- Get Sherlock Holmes with it. Listen and look for:
 - Values (the beliefs that drive donors)
 - Emotions (the donor's personal connection)
 - Motivations (what's driving their philanthropy)
- Reflect back what you hear to check your understanding





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What Did You Hear?

Get in groups of 2 or 3 and discuss what you heard in this donor statement:

"I was the first person in my family to go to college, and I feel incredibly fortunate. That's why I support scholarship programs."



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**Sherlock Cont'd:
Read the Room**

- Pay attention to cues
 - Energy shifts
 - Body language
 - What they avoid vs. what they lean into
- Adjust your questions accordingly



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Cultural Sensitivity in Donor Conversations

- Don't assume. Ask with curiosity.
- Respect different communication styles
- Understand giving norms vary
- Be mindful of power & trust



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Common Mistakes To Avoid

- Rapid-fire questions
- Asking without listening
- Leading questions
- Ignoring emotional cues



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Role Play

Pair up: a donor and a development officer

Ask at least three meaningful questions before mentioning your organization

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Bringing It All Together

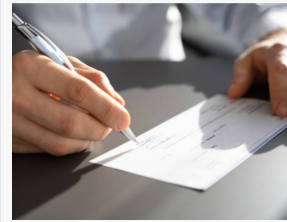
- Be curious, not transactional
- Ask to understand, not to respond
- Follow the donor's lead
- Depth is more important than quantity



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Donors don't just give to causes; they give to reinforce who they believe they are.



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WRAP UP AND CLOSE OUT

Any questions or concerns?



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- Creation of development plans
- Development coaching
- Fractional development support
- Board fundraising trainings
- Development asset creation
- Group development trainings





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Back to School Webinar Series

- Florida Property Tax Reform and the Impact on Nonprofits
- Foreign Enemies Requirements for Nonprofits
- Gift Acceptance Policies & Agreements



Unlike school, you don't want to skip these. Register today!

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Let's Keep In Touch!

 regina@edgeoversolutions.com

 thedevelopmentdept.com
edgeoversolutions.com

 [reginafnewkirk](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-development-dept)
[the-development-dept](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-development-dept)
[edge-over-solutions](https://www.linkedin.com/company/edge-over-solutions)

 [thedevelopmentdept](https://www.instagram.com/thedevelopmentdept)
[edgeoversolutions](https://www.instagram.com/edgeoversolutions)



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