

THE OTHER PERSON'S AGENDA

Your starting point for building a powerful relationship is always the other person's *agenda*. Not yours.

Let me introduce you to Richard Major. He is a senior executive at his company. He manages their very largest donors. He ranks number one in his organization for revenue production. And has for years.

One day we were sitting in a big conference room, with what Richard referred to as the "organization big honcho," at the head of the table. He was interrogating everyone about how much more growth they could squeeze out of their donor relationships. He asked each executive the same questions:

"What's your stretch revenue goal for this donor?"

"What additional projects can you sell?"

"What's keeping you from accomplishing your goal?"

When Honcho asked Richard, however, he met an immovable object. "So, what's your revenue goal for next year?"

Richard's terse response to the first question was, "I don't have one. It will depend on the donor." His reply to the second question was similar: "I don't know yet. I follow the donor's agenda." He added, "It's all about serving the donor's agenda, needs, and goals."

The next day, Richard and I had lunch at a local sandwich shop.

I asked Richard, "Why are you so successful with donors?" I wanted to know his secret.

"Let me show you something." He reached in his pocket. It was a small, folded sheet of paper. It was wrinkled and creased. It had obviously been opened and re-folded many times.

It looked like a list of names with some scrawls next to each name. Some words had been crossed out, and new ones written in.

"You see this piece of paper?" Richard asked me. "This is a list of the names of my top donors. Next to each name I listed that person's agenda— his or her most important priorities." He paused.

"My job . . . is to *help each one of them to accomplish their agenda*. Period. That's my singular focus."

Your relationship-building journey must start with the other person's agenda. Not yours. Theirs. Do you know what is important to them— really important? Only when you know this will you clearly see how you can help them and add value to the relationship.

Jerold Panas