

Get to Know Us Night: The Secret Weapon

The ‘Get to Know Us Night’ is long held successful method for getting people into your nonprofit. It employs some aspects of Sociology, Psychology, and TQM (Total Quality Management) theories. I personally have been using it since 1994 when I learned it from the Human Resource Department at the phone company. It was created to lay off 3,000 people from an 8,000-person workforce and make it to be their idea. It is very good at getting people to do things that they would not just automatically do. It does make some assumptions, however:

A. People want to do good things

Where it is true that good people are capable of doing truly horrible things when their environment dictates they do. It is equally true that truly horrible people are capable of doing truly selfless acts if the environment to do so is presented to them. So we are going to allow them to create the environment of their dreams. It allows them to create a group that allows them to be the best version of themselves. A utopia of sorts that will help make ways.

B. Perceived indebtedness

Most people are not good receivers. They like being self-sufficient and they are most uncomfortable. When the balance is off. Any woman who went out on a date when the male spends a bunch of money on her feels that indebtedness and its unwritten expectations, and we want to do just that. Put them in a place where they feel they owe us something.

C. Many hands make light work.

Most nonprofits are in business to do good things. They can have a huge impact; a much larger impact than most individuals can on their own.

Get as many guests as you can, have every member you have bring one or two people to participate in the evening. They will be Subject Matter Experts (SME) and you are looking for their advice. No more, no less. Set a date far enough in advance to get people to come out. Try to get 15-20 people out as guests. Pepper the group with your own members, but run them through a rehearsal for how the evening is to go prior to the event. I am going to say this now and you will hear it later in this article, but do you remember ‘Fantasy Island’? Remember the beginning? “Smiles everyone smiles!” Now is NOT the time for disagreements, arguments, or negativity.

Familiarize these 4 steps with everyone in the group:

1. Indebted Persuasion

Cause them to feel like they owe you something. This is done by serving dinner and making it a nice dinner. Do not break the bank, but no spaghetti and sauce either. Work out a menu that everyone can deal with. Stay away from seafood or pork to be safe.

2. Perceived Team Inclusion

Tie them into your team. Nothing makes someone merge into a team like asking them for help. So, tell them straight out that “I invited you here to ask for your help.” It disarms them, it makes them feel included in the outcome of this event. Name the group and tell them they are Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). It also breaks the feeling like you just roped them into a time share presentation! Tell them the general history of your organization and of its creation. Explain that the group’s participation numbers have shrunk and turned into a skeleton crew of sorts. Be sure to explain that your officers are repeating their terms and they are quickly running out of ideas and in that vein, we need the group’s advice.

3. Let the customer design your product

First rule in sales in my mind after 20 years in that end of business is “carry a product the customer cannot live without.” To do that you need to let the customer tell you what they cannot live without. In our case, it could be described as a place where they can go socially, make an impact, have some fun, to be accepted and supported. To that end you will want to get an easel, a BIG red marker, appoint a secretary to write on the easel, and ask the following questions below. Remember: NO ANSWER IS A DUMB ANSWER! Write down each answer and don’t forget to ask questions about anything that is not obvious to everyone. Write the results of each question on a separate page.

- a. First question: What charity do you think needs help and is worthy of it?
Explain that we do not have a bottomless treasury and that every dollar put to the charity will need to be replaced, which leads us to our next question:
- b. Second question: What is the most successful fundraiser you have ever seen, heard of, or attended?

Don’t forget to ASK QUESTIONS! Every interaction gets them closer to signing on the dotted line to engage, engage, engage! What is a calendar party, how does that work? What kind of supplies are needed?

- c. Third question: What are the best and most fun group activities they have ever seen or been to or part of? (FUN-raisers, not fund-raisers)

Helping all these charities and constant fundraisers can take an emotional toll on a person, and we need to have some fun in the process. Keep asking questions to get them to expand on their answers.

At this point in the program, bring in the next person planning their term. Show them the results of the Subject Matter Experts and let him or her engage in questions on the three lists. Keep in mind that the SMEs do not need feedback, so no: “we tried that and it failed, or that’s not going to work.” NO NEGATIVITY! And ask that person: “Can you plan a term supporting these charities, by employing these fundraisers, and plan these activities?” And when they say yes, turn to your group to ask the final question:

- d. Final question: “Are YOU SURE that if a group features a plan to support these charities, with these fundraisers, and did these activities, you would want to be part of such a group? Of course they will answer yes, because they just created utopia!

4. Closing in Gratitude

Show them that you value them and their time. Finish up with thanking them for their time, there is coffee and cake, and please get home safely, because they have been so helpful. At this point, DO NOT ASK THEM TO JOIN. Have a pile of petitions handy or a swag bag with one in it and some free gifts. Do not approach them, but let them come to you in asking to join. You should get back at least 50% of them as new members.

As a note here ... you need to follow through. If you say you are going to support that charity, then make sure that happens. Fastest way to lose someone is to ask their advice and then not take it. Or at least you need a good reason not to.

And there you have it! The best method I have ever used to get new members. Go with God and make it work for you.