

THE ART OF TRANSITIONAL DIALOGUE

The greatest challenge in this business is not getting people to listen to you. Rather, it is getting them to open up to you and freely share information and for you to be an active and involved listener. The best planned scripts and rebuttals will only be effective if they lead to a directed business dialogue, an engagement of minds between you and the individual you are calling. In many instances, whether or not this occurs depends on how well you have mastered the art of transitional dialogue.

Transitional dialogue is the necessary catalyst that provides direction and energy for the two-way discussion. The linkage and verbal pathways it opens allow you to smoothly move from script and/or rebuttal to free flowing conversation. It can be as simple as asking a relevant question, echoing a statement, coining a phrase, using a single word, and in some instances, nothing more than silence.

In many instances, a relevant question, properly asked can be instrumental to transitional dialogue. However, in order to take the edge off a question and/or to better position it in the natural flow of conversation, a “buffer statement” may be helpful. In the examples below a “buffer statement” is followed by a question (question possibilities are unlimited).

“You bring up a very good point... In specific terms, how does that influence this situation?”

“That’s an interesting statement... What has been your experience in dealing with this problem?”

“That’s understandable... If the circumstances were different would that change your position on this subject?”

“You must have a good reason for saying that... Would you share that with me?”

“Under the right circumstances, that would be a reasonable approach... Do those circumstances exist at the present time?”

“You may be right. After all, we’re talking about an important decision... What other factors do you take into consideration?”

“Obviously that’s a statement of value... Against what measurement or standard do you make that judgment?”

And two all time favorites:

“It has been many years since I’ve heard anyone make that statement... How does that apply to our discussion?”

“I’m not certain how to respond to your comment... Do you understand why I say that?”

These are just a few examples of “buffer statements”. It’s important to let them sink in for a second or two before asking your question because the individual with whom you are speaking

may wish to add comments to what has already been said. In any event, the buffering will help smooth the transition to your question while providing direction for the dialogue.

Remember

Always listen for the period. Do not jump in and cut people off because not only is this offensive but also it may preclude you from hearing what could be the most important thing they have to say.

Another technique that can be used to facilitate transitional dialogue is to “echo” the last statement or word said by the individual with whom you are speaking. Typical examples would include:

“ ... *don't work with recruiting firms.*”

“ ... *fee is too high.*”

“ ... *timing may not be right.*”

“ ... *not interested in looking.*”

“ ... *think about it over the weekend.*”

“ ... *things are looking good.*”

“ ... *no.*”

“ ... *yes.*”

“ ... *maybe.*”

Just by raising the last syllable of the last word you automatically turn their statement or word into a question. After you “echo”, keep quiet, allow them to respond and/or elaborate on their statement. Basically, you are asking them a question by using their own word(s). In most instances, this is far less threatening to them than a question using your words.

One of the most powerful tools you can use to encourage transitional dialogue is to just say the word “and” in response to one of their statements and then remain silent. However, this technique should only be used on a very select basis and generally only one time during a given conversation. Once again, all you have to do is raise the syllable and it becomes a question. Examples include:

Prospect: “*We believe there may be an internal candidate that would be right for this position.*”

Recruiter: “ ... *and.*”

Although the prospect may be a little confused by your “and”, they will generally respond by providing more information or by asking you what you mean by “and”. Your response might be:

“... and what are your contingency plans if the internal candidate is not interested in the position?”

Potential Recruit: *“I don’t believe I’d be interested.”*

Recruiter: *“... and.”* (Silence)

Generally, they will respond in the same manner as a prospect. Your response could be:

“... and you would not be interested because ...?”

Using “and” is about as simple as it gets. You just need to know when, in relation to your other alternatives, it can be used for its greatest affect.

Although similar to “and”, another technique to consider when attempting to develop transitional dialogue is the use of silence, generally preceded by some type of buffering statement. Examples include:

“That’s interesting.” (Silence)

“Hmmm.” (Silence)

“Really.” (Silence)

“Perhaps.” (Silence)

“Maybe.” (Silence)

Utilized properly, you can just remain silent which, within two to four seconds, creates a situation where the other party feels compelled to say something. Even if that something is:

Prospect/Recruit: *“Are you still there?”*

Recruiter: *“Yes I am.”* (Silence)

You can always add a reason for your silence such as:

“I need to carefully consider my response given the nature of your last statement.”

Or

“For your benefit I need to make certain I fully understand what you have just said to me”

Or

“Just thinking about all the variables that need to be considered before I can formulate a proper response.”

All of the examples in this article are just a minor sampling of the tools and techniques utilized by master conversationalists to stimulate transitional dialogue. Although they are simple to understand, they do require a great deal of practice before they become part of your natural

approach. Very importantly, by using transitional dialogue techniques, you will elicit more useful information while greatly improving your listening skills. After all, we learn from listening and understanding not from talking.

Practice these techniques with others in your office as well as in your personal life. You will be amazed at how useful they will be in helping you better understand the position of the other party in the discussion. And, as we all know, understanding is one of the cornerstones in building positive relationships.



*Terry Petra is available for one-on-one coaching, consulting and group training through “**Petra On Call**”, a cost effective approach to receiving the full benefit of his expertise. For details on Terry’s products and services, including “**Business Appraisals**”, visit his web site at: www.tpetra.com. As always, if you have questions or comments about this article or wish to receive Terry’s input on any other topic related to this business, your calls and e-mails are most welcome. Terry can be reached at (651) 738-8561 or e-mail him at Terry@tpetra.com.*