



Turning Conflict into Converts – Overcoming PAC Objections

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Thinking that we can deliver an effective PAC presentation or engage in a personal PAC recruitment conversation without objections is like thinking a bull will not charge you because you are a vegetarian. While there's a lot of wailing about PAC objections, the crime is not in the objections, but rather in our belief that there should be no objections or that those who "don't get it" are at fault. Unfortunately, neither is true.

When we mix politics and money, there will be natural concerns, objections, and clarifications requested from our audience. The key is for us to be adept at dealing with those objections, rather than wailing when the objections arise. There are simply no new PAC objections known to mankind.

Government relations professionals feel bullied by objections because we work with those who think like us, act like us, and talk like us. However, our prospects probably do not read the same things we do, do not think about public policy issues (if at all) as much as we do, and probably are not as passionate about civic engagement as we are.

The Three Approaches to Preparing for Objections

Effectively handling objections is largely based on what we do before, rather than in, the moment the objection surfaces. Government relations professionals tend to fall into one of three groups along a dimension of increasing sophistication.

One way some prepare is to self-reference, rather than contemplate the perspective of our PAC prospects. Unsophisticated influencers do not reflect on the influence situation at all. They would rather *do* rather than *investigate*. They like to have a short list of PAC tactics handy for any PAC influence situation. "I already know how to drive a car, so why should I look at a map? I know what buttons to push and what knobs to turn to make this car work."

When they do not get the PAC results that they want, they wonder why they have been unsuccessful. Many times we blame our audience for being unreasonable, obstinate, stupid, unaware, etc. (Sound familiar?)

More insightful agents ask *themselves* questions before proceeding. They ask, “What can I do so my request is accepted? How would I respond to this type of approach if I were the prospect receiving this approach?” Here, they use their own preferences, reactions, experiences and intuitions as a touchstone in their PAC appeals. This is better than the approach above, as it causes us to think of ingratiation strategies, which strengthen the bond of liking between us and our PAC prospects, and liking is integral to successful influence. This is a good place to start for successful and ethical PAC persuasion.

The problem here, however, is that we may be a very different person psychologically from our PAC audience members. And the more different we are, the less successful is our strategy of self-referencing. This is why we make horrid decisions and wildly inaccurate predictions about how our influence prospects, whether members, legislators, the public, etc. will react. We reference from *ourselves* instead of the *audience* and we do not think about problems the same way that laypeople do, so we are at the risk of misunderstanding their psychology by a large margin. (Which is why you and I must learn to suspect our own intuitions as we become more experienced influence agents.)

The third group of PAC recruiters are the truly sophisticated PAC influencers. They ask questions of their prospects as well as of themselves, and they ask the prospect questions first. They wonder, “*How does my prospect think, feel, perceive? What constrains or encourages my prospect to act?*” They forget about themselves and their own perspectives and attempt to understand the psychological processes that worked for the prospect. And they ask a *fundamentally* different type of question. Rather than starting with “What can I . . .” types of questions, they start with “What does the prospect . . .” types of questions in an attempt to determine the internal state of their audience member. Plus, they do this with each audience segment. Think of the various types of members you have in your association. Each are mini “voting blocks” who think differently from other association members.

That is a smart and very effective methodology. We can tell who the sophisticated and experienced PAC influence agents are. They aren’t the ones who arrogantly base their campaign on intuitive insights into the audience, tired patriotic quotes, or past experiences with other PAC audiences. They show a little humility because they know they cannot know everything about the particular audience. They start by collecting data, asking questions, handing out questionnaires, and talking to audience members. And, by the way, they continue to collect data *throughout* the PAC campaign, constantly modifying the approach to match the needs of the audience as the campaign unfolds.

So, instead of denigrating our audience for their lack of enlightenment, we should focus more on *their* perspective when developing our PAC pitch and responding to their sincere objections.

Don’t Take It Personally

Remember that many people who object to PAC participation simply are transferring their own organizational grievances to the PAC. They have their own agenda and want to make those concerns publicly known. However, don’t disregard their concerns as unenlightened. Others in your audience likely are thinking of the same questions but don’t have the courage to ask. A thoughtful response is a great opportunity for a “learning moment” with everyone in your audience.

No Apologies

I'm worried when I see PAC recruiters open their talk by apologizing for having to ask for PAC contributions. This is one of the weakest ways to start a PAC pitch. It can open the door to some hostile objections because you are subtly communicating that you are not positive about what you are asking your audience to do. If you don't approach the audience with a positive attitude, they certainly won't feel good about your message. Rest assured that your audience catches whatever attitude you are sending.

At one of my recent client PAC recruiter training workshops, one of the trainees began his presentation strongly. He was gliding so smoothly, there was no reason to stop this practice run until I heard him ask the audience: "Am I boring you?" Not to be content with this, he asked five minutes later, "Are you guys getting this? I can't tell by your faces." I was forced to grab the bull by the horns on the downhill slide and put a stop to it for a gentle critique.

When we give an inch of insecurity to our audience, they become nervous for us and neglect our message. They are just hoping we'll stop the bleeding.

Pay Attention

Be aware of your involuntary reactions to hostile questions. It is very easy to let your emotions show in such situations. Your audience isn't just saying "yes" or "no" to the PAC, but "yes" or "no" to you, the PAC messenger. Subtle changes in your eye contact and tone of voice convey your own reaction to the questioner. If you are angry that the person dared ask a certain question, it will show. For an instant reality check, videotape your next PAC presentation. (You can, safely and without the supervision of a trained professional, try this at home.) Watch for these subtle, yet powerful communications cues.

Albert Bandura's classic research showed that our words are only seven percent of our total message. Our facial expressions (predominantly the upper third of the face), tone of voice, and gestures account for the other 93 percent. If you sound apologetic, you are apologizing. If you look ashamed of the PAC, you are ashamed. People can sense this. If you don't feel confident on the platform, your audience doesn't view you as one who truly believes in your message. The result? Less PAC receipts, less personal credibility for you, and less credibility for the government relations team.

For those conducting PAC phone bank drives, your inflection and voice modulation is incredibly important. We do not have any other non-verbals to help influence our prospects over the phone, so our vocal quality is incredibly important.

Meet and Greet

Anticipate objections by working the room before your PAC presentation. Ask people what question about PAC's, politics or your issues that they have always wanted answered. You'll be able to refer to those questions later. You'll get more candor from people prior to the meeting than in an open Q & A with your board chairman sitting on the front row, which has an odd way of stifling input.

Agree with the Objection

Many times people simply want to be heard. So, rather than instantly rebut their objection, agree with it. Don't feel you always have to steer the ship in a different direction, but grab the wheel with them and steer together.

For example, "I am giving to the United Way and I don't have any more disposable income to give to the PAC." Your reply: "I agree. There's never enough money to give to all the deserving organizations. However, you've shown by your United Way contributions that you are an aware, involved citizen. PAC involvement is an extension of that awareness. Over 80% of our PAC contributors also give to United Way."

In this answer we've done a bit more than simply agree with the objection. We have used *altercasting*, a psychological tool that imbues a person with desirable characteristics. We have also used *consensus* by demonstrating that many others like her (United Way contributors) also give to the PAC.

It seems to be "rare sense," but I'll repeat it anyway. . . with all questions and objections, if you don't know the answer to the question, say so! Promise to get back to them with an answer by the next day. This excellent PAC customer service will benefit you and your department's brand.

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