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"Are you sitting down right now?"

A text message from a donor can send your mind in 100 different directions, and when a major gift prospect I'd been cultivating for a long time suddenly messaged me that way, I couldn't be sure what was going to follow.

A few seconds later, I learned our athletics program would be receiving the largest gift of the fiscal year and of the donor's lifetime to fully-fund a new golf practice facility. No matter how easy it appeared on the surface, this gift closure was the culmination of years of work as well and countless colleagues helping to pave the way.

The process to secure major gifts of any shape or size remains constant no matter the prospect or project: You need to define reality, cast vision and inspire hope.

Defining reality is the easiest part of this formula. Your donor can see, feel and hear reality. Make sure you communicate "the reality of the situation" in a way that's honest. Be transparent so the donor understands why the project is a priority.

Casting vision is your opportunity to paint a picture and help the donor understand what the "next" will look like. Your ability to truly understand your donor prospect, along with aligning their priorities and purpose with the opportunities at hand, will ultimately determine the success of the ask and impending gift closure. When the donor fully knows why the project is necessary for success, you can use this focused clarity to capitalize on their passion and generosity.

The passion of any diehard donor is sometimes hard to manage when the results in competition do not always go our way, so our vision-casting includes how we turn a "loss" into a positive and an opportunity to help the department get better.

That's where inspiring hope comes in. We have plenty of ways to support our student-athletes and their success, but how do we make sure the donors truly are inspired to fulfill their purpose? Each donor has a unique opportunity to step alongside our student-athletes in true partnership, grabbing the

oar together with them and rowing in the same direction.

Back to the donor who delivered big-time by way of a small text message.

Long story short, we thought we had the perfect golf practice facility in place many years ago. Just a couple of years later, however, it became necessary to shift our vision and achieve our goals in a different manner. Because we constantly want to build trust with our donors so they know we are being good stewards of their monetary resources, this meant several hard conversations with the donor prospect.

Throughout the process, we kept balancing reality with our vision, being extremely transparent about how we were working tirelessly to achieve the desired objective and inspiring hope that the prospect was in a unique and singular position to help us achieve something transformational for the program.

We knew this was going to be a significant and meaningful gift, and our team stayed the course over several years, even when we were not sure it would come through. Keeping true to the core process and strategy developed ensured a future facility for our golf programs that this donor – and this university – could not be more excited about.



Al Buddin

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During my 15 years in college athletics, I have had the opportunity to manage tickets in a basketball arena that originally opened in 1939 (McAlister Field House – The Citadel) and one that opened in 2002 (Alico Arena – FGCU). In both, there are design elements that show great operational foresight by the architects while other elements can leave you scratching your head. To make the most of your building from an operational, customer service and a revenue generating standpoint, you must take the time to learn about your building. You also need to consider the best ways to communicate any nuances to both your sales staff and to ticketholders.

Everyone seems to want to sit on an aisle so they don't have to climb over other guests to get to their seats. To steer guests toward interior seats – or to soften the disappointment of no aisles being available – I like to transpose the idea to guests that if you are on the aisle, everyone else has to climb over you.

Often, we take for granted our familiarity with the sports that we ticket for compared to the scope and schema of the average ticket purchaser. Every event is an opportunity for additional education in how interesting people can be. Teaching the use of clarifying questions can be very beneficial. Passing our additional knowledge on to the purchaser effectively requires careful consideration. The things that I take with me and use as training examples are the even more off-the-wall requests.

Several odd queries that come to mind are:

- Regarding basketball tickets – "What happens if it rains on the day of the game?"
- Regarding baseball tickets – "Are there any seats available behind second base?"
- Regarding football tickets – "Which endzone will my team be trying score in?"

Several design oddities that come to mind are:

- McAlister Fieldhouse has no 13's in the building, no section 13, but more impactful with most sections having 16 or more seats in a row, no seat 13. This leads to guests being upset and thinking that they didn't get consecutive seats when their tickets are for seats 12 and 14.

- Alico Arena has single-lettered sections on the first floor of the building and double-lettered sections on the second floor of the building. What makes this odd is that the sections are generally contiguous with each other and there are at most 16 total rows from the bottom of the first floor to the top of the second floor. This leads to guests fearing they will be in the "nose-bleeds" in section BB when their tickets are only 20 feet above the floor.

Taking your knowledge of the building and making the most of both positives and shortcomings can take many forms. No matter the venue, it's important to be both adaptable and prepared to think on your feet. In many cases, communication and, at times, overcommunication are your best options.