

AN OPEN LETTER TO SAMUEL

(As Conceived by Jerry Panas)

Dear Sam:

I'm going to disappoint you, I know. I have decided I am not going to make a gift to your program at this time.

I feel very good about your organization. I would not have agreed to see you and arrange for the appointment otherwise.

This is the first time you and I have met. You took over from Jane who had been calling on me for the past four years or so. I was very fond of her and we put together a number of programs I supported. I suppose you have my records and you already know that.

There are some things that just didn't go right at our meeting. If you're going to be calling on me again, I feel it only fair I bring them to your attention. My late husband often said, "If you can't trust the messenger, you can't trust the message."

Forgive me if I number those things that concerned me. My friends tell me I'm a bit anal. That's not a term we used when I was growing up, but I believe I understand what it means.

Don't be upset. I mean all of this in a very positive way. I hope it helps you. You're working for a great cause.

1. **You talked too much.** I think this may have been your most grievous offense. You didn't probe or ask me any questions. You totally dominated our session.
2. **Poor listening.** I've already mentioned that you talked too much, but I believe it requires underlining. You need help in learning how to listen. It is a great way to show that you care about someone. And if you show you care, they will care more about you. You didn't learn anything about me.

It seemed obvious it was your agenda and you weren't much interested in how I felt about anything— not even a simple question like: "How do you feel about this program?"

3. **You don't know me.** I know this is only the first time we have met but it seemed apparent from the beginning that you really didn't know a great deal about me or know of the important support I've given to the organization in the past. Next time we meet, make certain you review all the material you can about me. (You'll find out even more if you probe a little, ask questions, and listen !)
4. **Don't take me for granted.** I had the feeling that you were pretty certain I was going to make a gift to your program. At times I worried that you might have thought I had a sign across my chest that said: "I give money away."

You never once asked if this might be something I could be interested in. Did I have any concerns? Was this something that really touched me in my heart?

5. **Listen after you ask.** The few times you did ask a question, I didn't have the feeling you were really listening to what I said. I was watching you. It seemed that when I was talking, you were thinking ahead to how you might respond.
6. **Poor eye contact.** I know the times are different. When I was growing up we were taught in grade school how important it was to give a firm handshake and to maintain eye contact. We were taught that eye contact was tremendously important.

At times during our meeting, you seemed to be looking at some papers on your lap. And I noticed at times when you were talking, you were looking around to different things in the living room. If you had asked, I would have shown you my wonderful Steuben Collection. You might have gotten points from me if you had.

7. **The benefits.** I like to hear about what I can expect when I make a gift—what are the results. I don't mean that my gift will make it possible to build a new facility. I know that.

I do want to know how my gift impacts the lives that will be touched. That's what's important to me.

My husband used to tell me that when I make a gift, I'm actually investing in the institution. I want to know what I'm getting from my investment. I ask this very same question when I talk to my financial advisor.

8. **It was all about the program.** I think you talked far too much about the organization and the program. I know the organization quite well. I have been supporting it for years.

But you kept talking about what you need instead of how it will affect the lives of those you serve. That's what is really important to me.

Forgive me for mentioning Jane again. But she always told me how my gifts changed and saved lives. I love the idea that I can make a difference.

9. **Premature ask.** I was thinking you were probably somewhere in the middle of our discussion when all of a sudden, like a jack-in-the-box, you asked me for a gift. I didn't feel that you had thoroughly covered the topic and you certainly hadn't asked how I felt about it. And then, pop— you asked for the gift.

I thought, by the way, you asked for a great deal. That's why I didn't think you had really looked at my records. That's a bit more than I've ever given in the past.

10. **You assumed too much.** As you were talking, I gathered that you believed I knew all about the program. Actually, I knew nothing. You would have found that out if you had probed a little bit.

11. **Energy and passion.** I am afraid I live too much in the past. I apologize. But as I told you, when I went to grade school, they taught us to sit up straight. Not rigid. Relaxed. But straight.

I'm certain I put you in the wrong chair. That old chair in the living room does have a way of engulfing a person. You could have asked for a different chair. I would have understood. Or you could have asked if you could bring in a chair from the dining room.

The other thing, and I don't know how to describe it better for you, is that you actually didn't seem very excited or enthusiastic about the program. It seemed to feel, somehow, that you were carrying out a responsibility of making the call. Here I go again, but I must tell you that Jane was always so passionate about those things she talked to me about. And somehow, that rubbed off on me.

12. **Fancy brochure.** I meant to mention this earlier. Soon after you arrived, you pulled out that big folder. I hate to have you spending money on that fancy printing but I do understand that's something the organization feels it must do. But it has a negative effect on me. Some of my friends tell me the same thing.

But what bothered me during our meeting was that you referred to the folder often. And once, you actually read a whole page to me. Then you went over the drawings of the different floors. I confess to you, Sam, I never did understand those drawings. They have no meaning to me.

I hope you accept all of this in the spirit in which it is given. I love the organization and I want you to succeed, Sam. You are a nice young man and I'm certain we'll do much better the next time you come by.

Sincerely,

Abigail Van Kirk