Campbell & Company

Ghosted?

What to Do When a Great Prospect Goes Quiet

Kate Effland
Vice President

Adriana Lopez
Senior Consultant

10/28/2026

Presented in partnership with the Chronicle of Philanthropy

Celebrating 50 years of building successful campaigns & stronger organizations.

FEEDING AMERICA

Northwest African American Museum

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC MUSEUM

The Nature Conservancy

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

NewYork-Presbyterian

ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM & EDUCATION CENTER

CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM

MACALESTER

Ronald McDonald House

SWEDISH AMERICAN MUSEUM

FRANCIS PARKER SCHOOL

SELC SOUTHERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER

MEHARRY MEDICAL COLLEGE

LINCOLN PARK ZOO

ACLU AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOUNDATION

SOCIETY FOR SCIENCE & THE PUBLIC

CATHOLIC CHARITIES Archdiocese of Chicago

STEPPENWOLF

St Luke's Wood River Foundation

chicago botanic garden

MS National Multiple Sclerosis Society

bitly

Campbell&Company

Agenda

- Have you actually been ghosted?
- Audit the relationship
- Meet the three ghosts
- Match the response to the relationship
- Know when to pause, requalify, or move forward

You know this prospect

- They are near the **top of your prospect list**.
- Their giving history is strong.
- The **relationship** seems solid.
- The **capacity** is there.
- They appeared **interested**, asked questions.
- And now...

...Nothing

What kind of "quiet" brings you here today?

Audience Poll

A. A longtime donor stopped responding

B. A promising new prospect went cold

C. A campaign solicitation has stalled

D. A prospect gave me a timeline I do not like

E. All/most of the above

Have you *actually* been ghosted?

Have you actually been ghosted?

Actually Unclear

- Multiple unanswered, purposeful outreach attempts *(over a timeframe that is unusual for this relationship)*
- No stated next step
- A previously responsive prospect disappears

Direction You May Not Love

- "Contact me after the board vote."
- "Try me again in December."
- "This is not a priority for us this year."

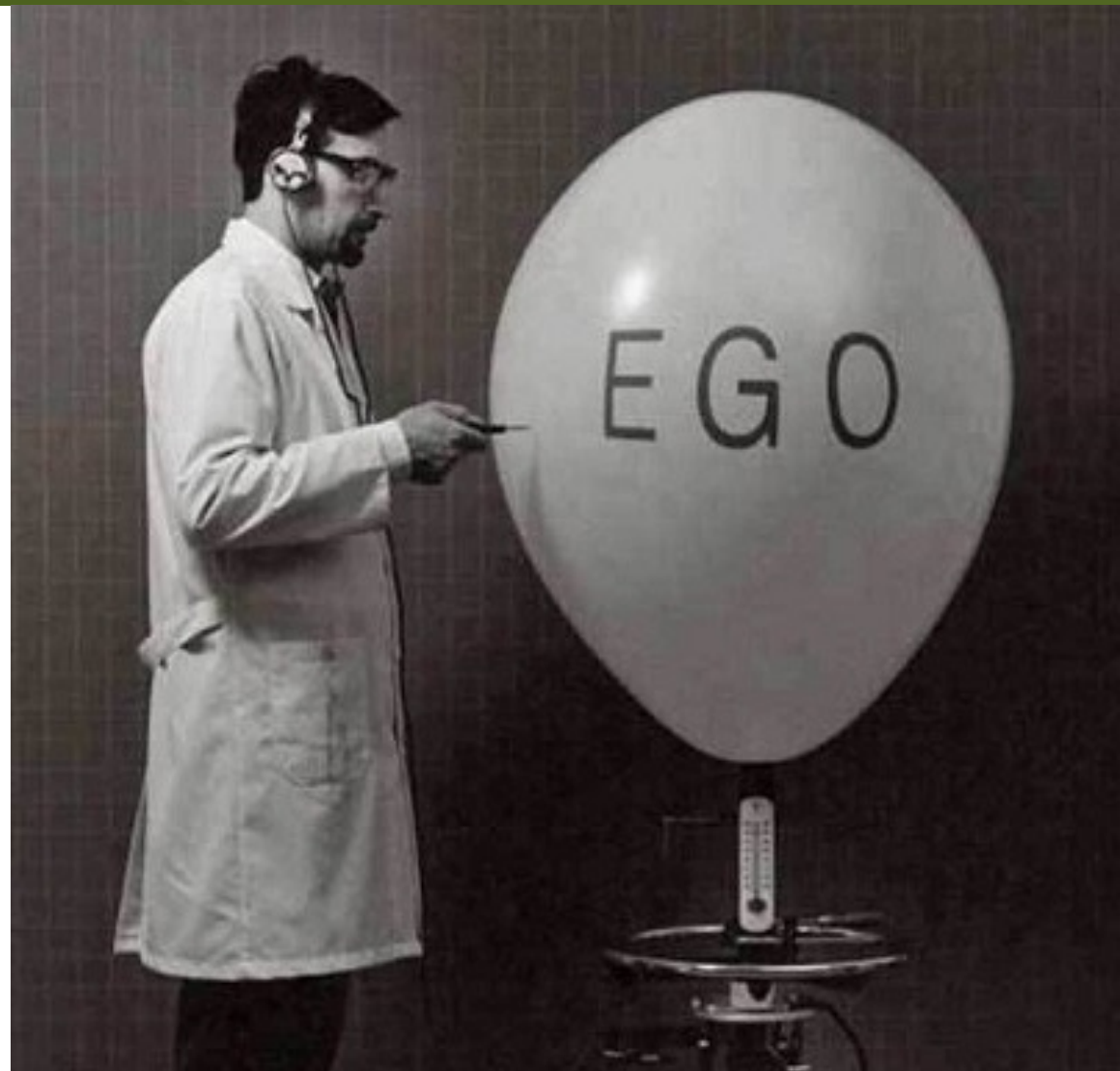
Campbell&Company

Diagnose Before You React

First, take your ego out of it

When someone does not respond, your brain may quickly decide:

- We lost their confidence.
- I handled the last conversation badly.
- They are no longer interested.
- The campaign is in trouble.
- I need to try harder immediately.



The pressures are real!

- Campaign timelines create real pressure.
- Gift tables make stalled relationships highly visible.
- Internal expectations can turn waiting into a perceived failure.
- **Your job is to manage the relationship, not force it onto your preferred timeline.**

Your sense of urgency is not automatically the donor's.

Start with a relationship audit

☑ Look back

- What was the last meaningful interaction?
- What changed immediately before the silence?
- Did we move too quickly or introduce pressure?
- Were agreed-upon next steps completed?

☑ Look beyond the fundraiser

- Has the organization experienced a leadership transition?
- Have we delivered what we promised?
- Has the donor received meaningful stewardship?
- Could trust, impact, recognition, or another institutional issue be contributing?

☑ Separate evidence from interpretation

- What do we know?
- What are we assuming?
- What has the donor actually told us?

Meet the Three Ghosts

Promising-but-Unproven Parker

High capacity, some signs of affinity, but never fully qualified.

Loyal-but-Quiet Quinn

A longtime or highly engaged supporter whose responsiveness has changed.

Post-Ask Pat

A prospect who goes quiet after receiving a solicitation.

The silence looks similar. The diagnosis and response should not.

Choose your response level

Choose your response level

These are options, not a sequence.

Start where the evidence and the relationship point you.

Campbell&Company

The Donor Silence Playbook

A set of plays to use differently depending on who has gone quiet

Make no assumptions

Try this internally:

1. What do we **know**?
2. What are we **assuming**?
3. What has the prospect actually **told us**?
4. When did we last receive a clear **signal**?
5. Has anything **materially changed**?

Useful for all three ghosts!

Review the tape

Promising-but-Unproven Parker

- What evidence of genuine inclination do we have?
- Has this person initiated or deepened engagement?
- Are we offering something relevant, or just requesting a meeting?

Loyal-but-Quiet Quinn

- When did the response pattern change?
- Have we mainly contacted them when we needed something?
- What promises, stewardship, recognition, or follow-up remain unresolved?

Post-Ask Pat

- Was the donor ready for the ask?
- Who else participates in the decision?
- What questions about amount, timing, structure, or purpose remain open?

What are we really diagnosing?

Ghost	Do not confuse…	Diagnose…
Promising-but-Unproven Parker	Capacity with inclination	Affinity, access, and credible next step
Loyal-but-Quiet Quinn	History with current satisfaction	What changed in the relationship or organizational experience
Post-Ask Pat	Silence with rejection	Readiness, ask fit, timing, structure, and decision process

Remember, they may still be listening...

Quiet prospects may still be paying attention

Continue:

Stewardship Updates	Campaign Progress	Stories of Impact
Leadership Communications	Invitations	Expressions of Gratitude

<u>Do not dramatically increase</u> communication frequency just because someone has stopped responding. <u>Do not disregard</u> either.

Best fit: Quinn, also relevant to Pat.

What helpful outreach looks like

Helpful

- ✓ Relevant & specific
- ✓ Clarifying (especially after an ask)
- ✓ Easy to absorb
- ✓ Connected to their interests
- ✓ Respectful of stated timing
- ✓ Not always tied to an ask

Not helpful

- ✗ Repeating the same request
- ✗ Artificial urgency
- ✗ Generic “just checking in” messages
- ✗ Every channel at once
- ✗ Every touch aimed at an immediate ask

Best fit: Useful across all three

Sample stewardship touch

Send Email

From: Your Name @ Your Org Stewardship

Subject: A quick update I thought you'd appreciate

B I H {{}}

Hi there,

You mentioned that [specific aspect of the work] was especially meaningful to you. We reached an important milestone this month, and I wanted to make sure you saw it.

Warmly,

cancel Send Email

Best fit:

- **For Parker:** Lead with relevance and value, not "coffee."
- **For Pat:** Lead with permission for candor, not another update.

Match the channel to the relationship

If the prospect tends to...		Consider...
Ignore long emails	→	A short voicemail
Respond to personal gestures	→	A handwritten note
Engage with organizational news	→	A relevant update with a personal intro
Prefer a particular leader	→	Outreach from that leader
Engage through experiences	→	A thoughtful, small-group invitation

Best fit: Useful across all three

The goal is not to surround the prospect. It is to reconsider whether the current communication method fits the person and relationship.

Ask how they want to be engaged!

Send Email

From: Your Name @ Your Org Stewardship

Subject: <*Name*>, Question for You

B I H {{}}

I wanted to follow up on the proposal and get a sense of where things stand on your end.

Is there a timeline you're working toward for a decision, and are there others who you want to be a part of the conversation?

I'm happy to reconnect in the new year if that is better.

cancel Send Email

Make the next step easy to answer:

- Not now
- Not this project
- Not this amount
- I need more info
- I am not interested

Best fit: Quinn and Pat

Call a friend

Retain:

- Authentic relationship
- Clear purpose
- Ability to listen
- Understanding of relationship history
- Defined responsibility for reporting back and follow-up

IMPORTANT!

- **Coordinate before outreach:** agree on why this person should contact the donor, what role they will play, and who owns the next step.
- Our friends are ideally not be used to deliver the same pressure through a different voice.

Best fit: Quinn

Bring an easy, authentic invite

Small, not mass

High-touch,
not high-production

Relevant,
not generic

A **real opportunity** to participate, advise, or see something new

Personal invitation, not automated registration

Best fit: Parker

Pause with a plan

A purposeful pause includes:

- Current status: actively pursue, pause/nurture, or requalify
- Relationship owner
- Last meaningful contact
- Evidence supporting the status
- Next review date
- Reactivation trigger
- Appropriate ongoing stewardship

Build a system that helps you organize your outreach

Document the engagement plan

- ❑ Relationship Manager
- ❑ Last meaningful interaction
- ❑ Agreed next step
- ❑ Reactivation trigger

An engaged $100,000 prospect may warrant more attention than an unresponsive $1 million-capacity prospect

Loyal-but-Quiet Quinn

Quinn: The lead campaign prospect who stopped responding

- Longtime donor and strong capacity
- Positive early conversations
- Interest in one campaign priority
- Three recent outreach attempts to schedule a solicitation
- Internal pressure to secure the leadership gift

POLL: What should you do?

A. Ask them to join a volunteer day

B. Send them a campaign fundraising update

C. Call a friend

D. Pause with a plan

E. Other?

Takeaways

Which persona best fits my donor relationship?

What do I know?

What am I assuming?

What changed before the silence?

Which play best fits for my donor?

Is it time to pause with a plan?

Silence is a signal, but it does not tell you what it means.

Audit the relationship. Identify the kind of silence. Choose the response that fits. And know when a purposeful pause is the strongest next move.

Thank you!

Adriana Lopez
Senior Consultant
adriana.lopez@campbellcompany.com

Kate Effland
Vice President
kate.effland@campbellcompany.com

Campbell & Company