

20 Questions: The Donor Communications Test

Created for fundraisers, their bosses, their boards and especially for newbies to the nonprofit world (*Welcome!*): to promote a quick, common understanding of profitable, proven best practices in appeals, newsletters, and thanks ... printed and digital.

BTW: Please share this multiple-choice test freely with others.

This test is offered as a public service to a nonprofit industry undergoing enormous and rapid change. Loads of us are trying to catch up; I know I am. The answers inside were world-sourced from top experts who without hesitation or compensation contributed their knowledge and time. This test was collated and edited **by Tom Ahern** — which means that any mistakes are mine, definitely *not* my stable of experts. If you spot errors or things worth adding, let me know for the next edition: a2bmail@aol.com.

There are exceptions to every rule.
— *Aristotle*

20 Questions

Print out pages 4-7. **Mark** your choices.

For cheaters: a short list of answers is in the back. Just kidding: we sell those for \$5,000 apiece.

1. How old is the typical donor?

- ☐ 35 years of age
- ☐ 55 years of age
- ☐ 75 years of age

2. How long will an average donor give to a charity?

- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 4-6 years
- ☐ 7-10 years
- ☐ more than 10 years

3. What percentage of US charitable income is now raised online?

- ☐ Less than 10% of the total
- ☐ Somewhere between 10-25% of the total
- ☐ More than 25% of the total

4. Is direct mail past its peak?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

5. What's the best length for a fundraising letter?

- ☐ 1 page
- ☐ 2 pages
- ☐ 4 pages

6. What's the preferred "grade level" for a direct mail appeal?

- ☐ 6th grade
- ☐ 9th grade
- ☐ 12th grade

7. How often can you ask in a year without driving off donors?

- ☐ Once a year
- ☐ Three times a year
- ☐ A dozen times a year
- ☐ 21 times a year

8. Does "raising awareness of our charity" in fact raise more money, as many assume?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

9. "Appeals make money. Newsletters lose money."

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

10. Which are better, stats or stories?

- ☐ Stats
- ☐ Stories
- ☐ Depends on your audience

11. How many charities will a typical donor support in a year?

- ☐ fewer than 5
- ☐ 5 or more

12. How quickly should you thank a new donor?

- ☐ Within 48 hours
- ☐ Within a week?
- ☐ Within a month?

13. Should you include an "ask" in your thank-you letter?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Dealer's choice

14. Which will raise more money?

- ☐ Pictures of happy kids
- ☐ Pictures of sad kids

15. Which kind of household is most likely to leave a bequest to charity?

- ☐ Lower class
- ☐ Middle class
- ☐ Upper class

16. "If we educate our donors about the work, they'll give us more."

- ☐ False
- ☐ True

17. Who's the real hero in fundraising communications (appeals, newsletters, website, etc.)?

- ☐ The charity
- ☐ The donor
- ☐ The people helped

20. Who should approve donor communications (appeals, newsletters, etc.)?

- ☐ Appropriate board committee
- ☐ Board chair
- ☐ Director of development (i.e., the chief fundraiser)
- ☐ Executive director

The Answers

1. How old is the typical donor?

Answer: 75 years of age

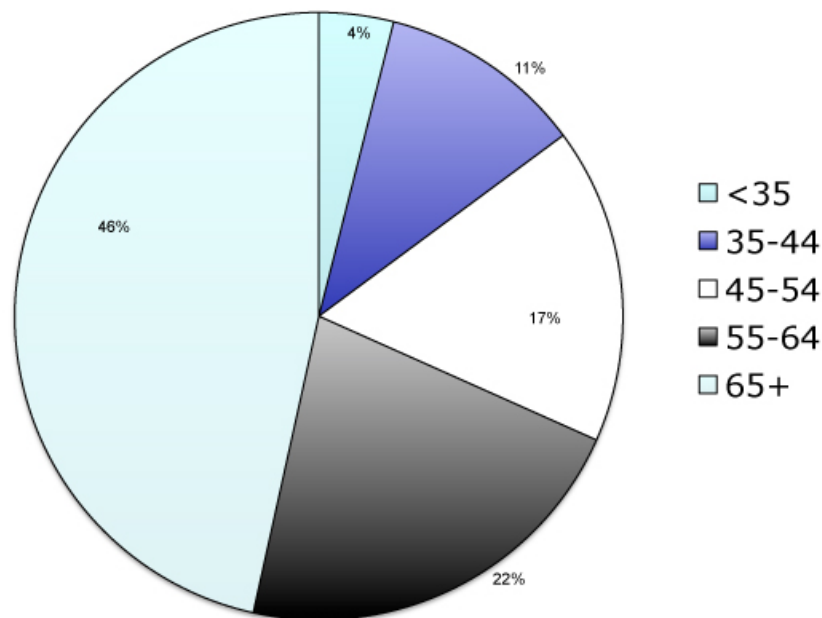
Notes and assumptions....

"A young donor in the U.S. is 60," Jeff Brooks said in 2013.

Jeff writes direct mail for all sorts of national charities. He is one of the most successful and well-informed people working in fundraising today. His long-time employer, TrueSense, is a major league fundraising mail house and, thus, sits on a mountain of data.

I asked Jeff the same question. He sent me a pie chart showing the ages of average American donors, as investigated by TrueSense, using data from Target Analytics Group, a Blackbaud company. "But it comes out this way no matter who does the research," he notes. "I've seen it many times through the years."

Donors aged 65 and older comprise (by far) the largest slice of the American charity pie. Those under age 35 comprise the smallest slice of the same charity pie.



What you need to know: the young will likely always be the smallest slice of the charity pie in the US, for obvious economic reasons.

Over his long career, Jeff Brooks has observed this behavior: "At age 55, people start to become reliably charitable. They're starting to have some extra money." Their kids are through college. The house will be paid for soon. There is a bit of surplus money. "These households

start to give to charity. And their giving ramps up until age 65, where it plateaus. It continues from then on until something intervenes." Something like illness, or destitution, or death. A client of mine received their first check from a donor when the woman was age 55; the last gift came in when the woman was 101, just before she passed.

I write the direct mail appeals for a major metropolitan hospital system serving a population of over 3 million. This hospital system has tens of thousands of donors. And, since most were former patients, we know exactly when those donors were born.

The average donor supporting this particular hospital system is 75 years old.

Read that again. And again. Because this might be the one detail that's holding your NGO back: you think you're speaking to everyone, but in fact you're mostly speaking to older folks.

There are consequences. Respect them.

Around 2012 the AIGA (essentially, the graphics artists' trade group in the United States) issued an advisory: "For eyes over 60, use 14 point type for body copy."

Lest you forget: a good "customer service experience" is the chief reason why donors stick with you. For eyes of "a certain age," 14 pt. type will be a good customer service experience ... while 12 pt. type will not be.

Now. You. Know.

There are plenty of younger donors. But....



You acquire younger donors in bulk through something called "face to face" (F2F) fundraising. It occurs on the streets, not in the mailbox nor online.

Personable, energetic, well-trained and licensed 20- and 30-somethings intercept on the street other 20 and 30-somethings (or, if the pickings are slim, older people), to sign them up for monthly donations, usually to a brand-name charity such as Oxfam. The photo shows F2F fundraisers for the Fred Hollows Foundation, a highly regarded Australian charity that works to restore sight in more

than 25 countries.

F2F fundraising originated in the UK, with Greenpeace among its leaders. The tactic became so widespread (and intrusive) on certain London streets that by 2002 the press had dubbed it "chugging," short for "charity mugging."

That aside, gifts obtained through F2F now amount to one-third of Australia's annual charitable haul, little more than a decade after the tactic arrived on its shores, signing up hundreds of thousands of new donors every year.

And yet ... even in Australia, where F2F fundraising is huge ... older donors rule the roost. After crunching the numbers, Sean Triner, co-founder of Pareto, that country's largest direct mail and phone fundraising agency, concluded simply: "Older donors are better." Why? They tend to stick longer and hence give more in total.

"The younger groups will NOT stay with you in good numbers," Jeff Brooks noted, "even if you can find them. But the 'almost old' are promising. They give higher average gifts than 65+,"

and once they're aboard, they can stay with you for many years. This is the group that can turn around your fortunes and drive you to a brighter future."

The next big "giving generation" will be baby boomers, born 1946-1964. In 2016, the oldest were 70, the youngest were 52. You won't see the last of them until 2064 or so. It's a rich river to fish in. Together, baby boomers control over 80 percent of personal financial assets in the United States, says a well-sourced Wikipedia article.

2. How long will an average donor give to a charity?

Answer: 6 years or less

Notes and assumptions....

I asked my global family of top experts this purposely simplistic question: "How long, do you think, the average donor gives to the same charity? 5 years? 10 years? 25 years? Off the top of your head."

I learned one thing right away: don't overestimate the "stickiness" of new donors.

Over half of first-time donors give just once, several respondents pointed out. Very few donors stay longer than a few years: precisely 4.6 years in the UK, according to Dr. Adrian Sargeant's research, based on an analysis of 5 million records. "It's an amalgam of all forms of giving, so it lumps together very different types of giving," he admitted. "But as a number, it's nice. And it's getting lower each year."

Which means a program for regularly acquiring new donors remains vital to your nonprofit's financial health.

Degrees of separation vs. intimacy

Beth Ann Locke said this: "The rise of peer-to-peer giving" — e.g., I sponsor you in a 10K run — "shortens the lifespan of donors. They give to a 'charity' but are really usually only giving to their friends. This certainly has the great opportunity of casting a wide net, but the net is gossamer."

Remember her comment as you read Mark Phillips' response (he's the founder and manager of Bluefrog in London): "I find that the best 5% of the file tend to stick with you forever. The problem is the other 70% of people who only ever intended to give once. They really drag your average down."

Roger Craver, co-editor of The Agitator, and one America's all-time direct mail champs, estimated donors stick around "...about 4 to 5 years, top of my head. The single donors who only ever give one gift weigh down longevity [as Mark said]. If you're looking only at donors who make two or more gifts, I would say the span is closer to 7 or 8 years."

Nor are all charities equally compelling. "When I had my heart attack, my local hospital fixed me right up" is an event to remember. While going out to a play for the evening is probably not.

Rory Green, Associate Director of Advancement, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Simon Fraser University: "Many of my donors have given consecutively for 10+ years ... BUT we're a bit of an anomaly. I would imagine the answer would differ, too, across generations: [older people] longer and less so as donors get younger."

Beth Ann Locke, Director of Advancement, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, also at Simon Fraser University, agreed: "I think older donors are more loyal. [At one hospital, there were] donors who had had hips and knees replaced who just gave and gave, as long as you kept asking, for 20+ years. I'd say with some universities it is the same, once the habit takes hold." In contrast, Beth Ann saw a different pattern at an art museum: "You would bring them into the fold as donors after being members. Then they would fall off in a few years."

3. What percentage of US charitable income is now raised online?

Answer: Less than 10% of the total

Notes and assumptions....

The Chronicle of Philanthropy asked America's 400 largest charities for data about their online fundraising results during 2013. What was learned?

"While online fundraising continues to gain steam, " the Chronicle reported,¹ "it still accounts for a very small portion of the money charities rely on. Among the 76 nonprofits that provided both their online and overall giving totals for 2013, the median share of online gifts is just 2 percent of all donations from private sources."

Take comfort perhaps: if your nonprofit is not yet seeing big results from online giving, you're not alone. But the trend is clear: online giving is rising, up 9.2% in a single year, according to Blackbaud's latest Charitable Giving Report, released in February 2016.

Blackbaud's sample size is impressive, crunching data from 3,786 nonprofits large and small. In 2015, these organizations altogether raised \$14.5 billion from individual donors, 7.1% of that online.

One area of online giving growth worth watching: #GivingTuesday. Debuting in 2012, this counterweight to the consumer feeding frenzies of Black Friday and Cyber Monday, arrives annually the first Tuesday after the US Thanksgiving holiday. It was started by NYC's 92nd Street Y and the United Nations Foundation.

¹ May 18, 2014, "Online Giving Grows More Sophisticated," Chronicle of Philanthropy

Online donations for #GivingTuesday rose 52% in 2015, the fourth year of the event; with 17% of those being made on a mobile device such as an iPad or iPhone. Globally, \$117 million was given online in response to #GivingTuesday.

4. Is direct mail past its peak?

Answer: No

Notes and assumptions....

For a couple of decades, fundraising futurists have droned on about the sure demise of direct mail, deeming its printing and indicia "irrelevant" in a digital era. But as Mark Twain wrote a worried friend, "The report of my death was an exaggeration."

- Fact #1: Direct mail is still **by far** the way most U.S. charities, big and small, attract new, first time, "first date" donors.
- Fact #2: Direct mail is how most U.S. charities continue to ask current donors to give yet again ... NOT via email (which recipients ignore, by and large) ... but via direct, physical, well-personalized, non-boring direct mail. (Phone calls are a big help, too.)

Direct mail, in fact, drives a lot of online giving.

As Jeff Brooks noted in 2014, "Direct mail sends more people to give online than any digital medium like Facebook or email does." Boston-based expert, Tina Cincotti, said that 15% to 37% of online gifts are prompted by a letter. "Plus," she cautions, "donors are three times more likely to give online in response to a direct mail appeal than to an email appeal. Direct mail not only isn't dead. It's more important than ever."

Tina makes another point, this time about multiple touches. "By receiving a letter and then giving online, that supporter has become worth more to you. Donors connected to you through multiple points give at least 20% more than donors connected through only one channel. They also have better conversion rates. And higher retention rates. So you'd best be fundraising *both* online *and* offline."

One clear danger to direct mail fundraising is ever-rising cost of postage. As Patricia Vidov of Operation Smile Canada pointed out in 2015, "There's nothing like the mail to tell your story. But it's expensive... You have to spend 50-plus cents to get it to them, then another 75 cents to get their gift back and another 75 cents to thank them."²

The outbound expense is the killer.

If the response rate to your direct mail acquisition appeal is 1% (which counts these days as a reasonable return for a non-premium direct mail pack), then 99% of your mailing has

² CDS Global blog, Emmy Silak, February 18, 2015

produced zero revenue. That's a lot of printing and postage expended to land one new donor. An oft-heard rule of thumb is, "In acquisition, you'll spend two dollars to raise a dollar." You'll spend \$60 to land a \$30 gift. You only go into the black on direct mail when *and if* that newly acquired donor gives again and again. Too few do: eight out of 10 first-time donors in the US, on average, do not make a second gift to the same charity.

So: while acquiring new donors is vitally important to refresh and grow your base, your skills at *retaining* those new donors is where the real money hides.

5. What's the best length for a fundraising letter?

Answer: 4 pages

Notes and assumptions....

I know: it's counterintuitive. But here's the thing....

What matters isn't the page count. What matters is the quality of the writing.

A lousy 4-page letter will not outperform a lousy 1-page letter. A great 4-page letter *will* outperform a great 1-page letter.

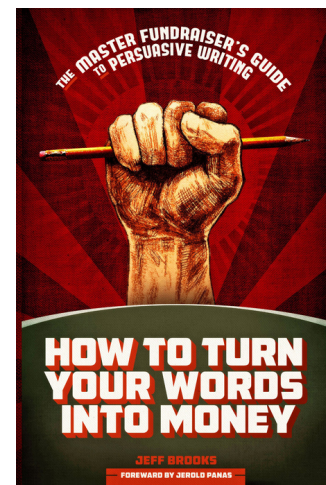
Amateurs may disagree. But among top direct mail professionals worldwide, there is zero debate: they expect to get their strongest results writing longer letters ... and they test that assumption a lot. "Long letters pretty much always do better [in those tests]," Jeff Brooks told me. "And that's true for acquisition as well as donor cultivation."

And why wouldn't they? Professionally written letters work hard to entertain you, to grab you, to keep you on the edge of your seat, to draw you in and onward. Masterful letters are fast, built for skimming. They're warm and flattering. They tell a vivid story of urgent need ... and treat you, the donor, as a hero.

Most charities are stuck with letters written by the un- or slightly trained. Let's be clear: with those letters, shorter is better. State your case, make your ask, be grateful, be polite, be brief and be gone.

To succeed consistently with direct mail, you must get training. There's a lot of behind-the-scenes machinery you have to know your way around, for one thing. One reason 4-page letters do better? There's plenty of room to accommodate the apparatus.

At a minimum, read the frequently updated classic, Mal Warwick's, *How to Write Successful Fundraising Appeals*. The latest edition (2013) covers both postal and emailed appeals. And for good measure, and an even deeper understanding of the writer's thought process, get a copy of Jeff Brooks' *The Fundraiser's Guide to Irresistible Communications* or his latest, *How to Turn Your Words into Money*.



6. What's the preferred "grade level" for a direct mail appeal?

Answer: 6th grade

Notes and assumptions....

"Grade level," as measured by the Flesch-Kincaid readability test, has to do with just one thing:

How quickly *my* brain can move through *your* prose.

Below, on the left, are the readability scores for a successful direct mail letter. On the right are the readability scores for a university-written case for support. The one on the left will be a brisk read for everyone. The one on the right will be a slog for everyone, even the Ph.D.s.

You decide. Your writing can bring me clarity. Or your writing can bring me labor. Which do you think is more "reader convenient" or appreciated?

Readability Statistics		Readability Statistics	
Counts		Counts	
Words	306	Words	1828
Characters	1586	Characters	10439
Paragraphs	28	Paragraphs	32
Sentences	31	Sentences	78
Averages		Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.6	Sentences per Paragraph	4.1
Words per Sentence	8.4	Words per Sentence	21.8
Characters per Word	4.9	Characters per Word	5.6
Readability		Readability	
Passive Sentences	0%	Passive Sentences	10%
Flesch Reading Ease	69.6	Flesch Reading Ease	23.9
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	5.6	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	12.0

Of course, if you mention that you're writing at the 8th-grade level, someone will likely object. "We're an engineering school, for goodness sake," the argument goes. "Most of our donors have graduate degrees. We *can't* risk talking down to them."

Reasonable sounding ... but wrong.

Writing at a lower grade level is not about talking *down*. It's about talking *clearly*. You can write about astrophysics at the 8th-grade level. (And if you're writing for a general audience,

you should.) In fact, grade level and reading ease scores have little to do with vocabulary. After all, a computer running a formula decides your score. That computer is not "reading." It's counting. It's calculating ratios of long to short. If most of your sentences are simply constructed, if you keep multisyllabic words to a minimum, you'll do fine.

The preceding paragraph scores at the 6th-grade level, by the way. Did it seem like I was talking down to you?

Pennsylvania and many other states now require that insurance policies score no higher than the 9th-grade level on Flesch-Kincaid. Novels written for airport book stores score at the 4th-grade level. And the Wall Street Journal hovers around the 9th-grade level, reporting on everything under the sun.

And where did Flesch-Kincaid scoring originate, you wonder? With the US Navy. The Navy needed technical manuals for, say, F-15s, that someone with a high school education could easily understand. They contracted with J. Peter Kincaid, a psychologist and university professor, and the Flesch-Kincaid grading system was born. Soon after, it became the Department of Defense's military standard for all technical manuals.

Kincaid verified and applied the methods and insights of Dr. Rudolf Flesch (1911-1986). Flesch, a Viennese lawyer who fled the Nazis and resettled in New York, published many books on the subject of clear, effective communication. Time magazine dubbed him the "Mr. Fix-It of writing." He was also known as "the man who taught Associated Press how to write." I have his 1949 book, *The Art of Readable Writing*, a gift from Steve Herlich. But Flesch's most famous book became *Why Johnny Can't Read: And What You Can Do about It*. That book inspired Dr. Seuss to write *The Cat in the Hat*.

The preceding paragraph scores at the 8th-grade level. Did it seem like I was talking down to you?

Final word goes to the late, great George Smith (1940-2012), writer for Oxfam, Amnesty, Greenpeace, Unicef, WWF and many more. He said, "All fundraising copy should sound like someone talking."³ The grade level of conversation is low.

7. How often can you ask in a year without driving off donors?

Answer: 21 times a year

Notes and assumptions....

Doesn't seem possible, does it? And yet....

Stick with me: this gets complicated.

³ Tiny Essentials of Writing for Fundraising, George Smith, 2003, The White Lion Press

We were at the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference in Seattle. Mid-November, 2014. The hall held a rare concentration of top experts. Next to me at the table sat Jeff Brooks, a senior copywriter at TrueSense, one of America's best direct mail firms.

A fundraiser in the audience asked a seemingly simple question: "How often can you ask in a year without losing donors?"

The answer?

I glanced at Jeff. He flashed the number 20 with his fingers. *Really?*

Then another fundraiser took the floor to describe a test he'd done, to see what the limit was. His charity mailed 21 solicitations in a year before gifts tapered off. And is 21 really all that intrusive? It comes down to less than two solicitations per month. During the US Presidential campaigns I'd get more than two solicitations *per day* from candidates I supported.

But let's be honest: **over-solicitation** is probably NOT your charity's problem.

So stand in awe of this shocking true-life maximum number of 21. And know most charities are nowhere close.

In answer to the question, "How many times a year should I mail my donors?" Canadian expert Alan Sharpe advises, "Mail at least eight times a year. Mail at least four appeal letters and mail at least four newsletters (or donor cultivation, donor information type pieces)."⁴

Paradoxically, one reason so many first-time donors do not make a second gift⁵ is *under-*, not *over-*, communication. Basically, these new donors forget about you, or you never form any kind of bond with them.

It's funny, though

In focus groups, veteran donors complain long and loud about being over-solicited by their favorite charities. But if you watch their giving behavior, you will find that they don't stop giving as a result.

Fabienne, my French cousin-in-law, is a perfect example. She's a retired teacher; happily married with one beloved adult son. And she's got a big heart. She gives to about two dozen charities a year, prompted by direct mail. She's given to some for decades.

And the **ONLY** thing she doesn't like about them and will sharply criticize is over-solicitation. "I give every year," she steams. "Why do they send me appeals all the time?" She sees it as wasteful. Her opinion, in sum: "Spend that money on the mission, not extra mailings!" Yet ... despite this "appeal harassment" and a presumption of donor fatigue ... Fabienne continues to give to the same charities year after year.

In November 2014, the CEO of Grizzard, Chip Grizzard, reported on some surprising test results. In the test, donors of \$500 or more were allowed to limit the number of appeals they'd receive in the coming year. If they didn't specify otherwise, they'd receive 12 appeals. "Of the 500 in the group," Chip wrote, "186 [37%] wrote back and designated the specific mailings they wanted during the next 12-month mailing cycle. Interestingly, the most mailings anyone selected was three."

⁴ p228, *Mail Superiority*, Alan Sharpe, Andrew Spencer Publishing, 2008

⁵ Data released by Blackbaud in 2014 showed that over three-quarters (76%) of first-time donors do not give a second time to that same charity.

The end-of-year results surprised everyone. "The donors who received all 12 mailings gave 35% more than the ones [who'd limited their appeals]." What did the test sponsor learn? 'I learned that unless a major donor asks to limit his/her mailings, they should stay with the normal cultivation strategy. You never know when something will strike a donor's fancy. Each appeal is different.'"

Jeff Brooks commented, "There's an important lesson here: **Less mail, less giving.** That's true in nearly every situation. Including major donors. Never assume donors will give more or retain longer if they get less contact. It almost never works that way."

Don't over-react to complaints about over-solicitation. They're probably false alarms. And certainly don't listen to the timid amongst us who fret, "We'll drive off our donors if we ask too often." While it sounds reasonable, even considerate, the science says it's dead wrong. The correct view is, "We'll leave a lot of money on the table if we don't ask often enough."

One last thing.

Since I've tripped over this peculiar misunderstanding more than once, let's be clear: when we talk about an "annual fund," the word "annual" has nothing to do with asking just once a year. Rather, it has to do with what you're raising money for: your charity's annual operating expenses.

One cure for complaints about "over solicitation"? Choice.

There is a countermeasure you can take that will fend off complaints about over-solicitation: send your first-time donors a little questionnaire that asks them about their "communications preferences."

The survey should ask these newcomers what they want to get from you (email, annual reports, special appeals, annual appeals) and how often.

This kind of courtesy up front can prove profitable down the road. Dr. Adrian Sargeant's research found that donors, when asked their "communications preferences," tended to stay with charities longer and make bigger average gifts.

"Offering donors choice is key," he wrote in *Fundraising Principles and Practice*.⁶ "When do you want hear from us? What aspects of our work are you interested in? Would you like e-mail or regular mail? Are you interested in a newsletter or a once-a-year update? Would you like news but not to be asked for money?"

Dr. Sargeant offers as his best example the communications survey used by the Camphill community of nonprofits in the UK. It's printed on the back of every communication the charity sends out. The survey allows the donor to choose or change the frequency of newsletters. It allows the donor to continue getting information but halt all appeals. It even allows the donor to check this box: "I would prefer you NOT to write me again."

Crazy? Like a fox. As Dr. Sargeant points out, "Offering donors choice has been the foundation of Camphill's [fundraising] success." Jeff Brooks confirms the phenomenon:

I've had the same results from this, and the really amazing thing is that you get better long-term value [LTV] from all the groups in this scenario:

⁶ *Fundraising Principles and Practice*, Adrian Sargeant, Jen Shang and associates, 2010, Jossey-Bass.

- *Those who return the questionnaire and in some way ask for reduced communication.*
- *Those who respond but don't limit you*
- *That VAST majority (90%+) who don't respond at all*

All groups improve their LTV. The only group that doesn't is those who say "remove me from your list" (and that's a TINY group).

8. Does "raising awareness of our charity" in fact raise more money, as many assume?

Answer: No

Notes and assumptions....

"We need to raise awareness!" "If only we had more visibility in our community!" It doesn't matter how you say it. Neither is a substitute for fundraising.

"Increased visibility" is a well-meaning remedy. Boards and bosses love the idea. It seems like an obvious and cheap solution. And until "visibility" is "increased," there's little point in fundraising hard. Whohoo! Bonus points for that, from a board point of view. *We can relax until staff get this visibility thing figured out.*

Still, here's my point: chasing "increased visibility" rather than fundraising is the wrong direction to go in.

It's also irresponsible from a fiduciary standpoint. If I wanted to sue your charity for board malfeasance, an insistence on "increased visibility" might well be my point of entry. "You thought increased visibility would raise money by itself? What are you, nuts?"

"Increased visibility" is a by-product, not a goal. It is so for every organization, for-profit or nonprofit ... unless you have ball fields of money. (Charities, spoiler alert: you don't.)

People assume that, when an organization and its mission become better known, gifts automatically follow. Sure: if you're a global celebrity like Mother Teresa. Or you can buy your way into everyone's head, as some nonprofit version of Coca-Cola.

Now you see the problem, right?

You can't *rise* above the noise. (Playtime: say it as Jack Nicholson would, in the courtroom climax of *A Few Good Men*. Hint: "You can't handle....")

It's a money problem, charities. You don't have anywhere near enough. And you most likely never, ever will. Coca-Cola buys every space it can where any eyeball might rest for a moment. HENCE: Coca-Cola can BUY its way into my head ... even though I drink very little: maybe two Cokes a year? So Coke has top-of-my-mind awareness. I consider Coke's product a publicly-tolerated poison ... yet I think about it automatically. Why? Coke has limitless pockets.

So, OK: let's say you are a local nonprofit instead. Your work is incredible, innovative, worthy of support from the entire community. And then a local newspaper ... or an online local news service ... or the big local talk-radio personality notices you for one news cycle.

What happens next? Maybe two people contact you. If the talk-show person included a strong call to action, maybe ten people contact you. Maybe nobody contacts you. *Likely* nobody contacts you. (Unless your good cause is The Society to Make BBQ the State Bird.)

"Raising visibility" is NOT the same as "raising funds."

What do three top performers have to say about the issue?

Up first: Jeff Brooks, from his blog, Future Fundraising Now.

"Some 'marketing experts' would have you believe fundraising is a two-step process: First you must make prospective donors 'aware' of your organization, then you can ask them to give."

Jeff is senior creative director at one of America's most successful direct mail fundraising firms. "Two-step fundraising is a colossal waste of money. You basically double your cost and get nothing in return. The truth is, if you have limited resources, there's almost no way you can justify spending them on awareness campaigns. For the awareness campaign to be worthwhile, it would have to improve fundraising by 67%. If you've been in fundraising for more than a couple of years, you know how unlikely that is. The reality is that most awareness campaigns make *no measurable difference* for fundraising campaigns."

Up second: Tobin Aldrich, who, among other achievements, led World Wildlife Fund UK to new fundraising heights.

He wrote in his blog, "...one of those counter-intuitive things about fundraising is that people don't actually have to have heard about your charity before [they'll] respond to a fundraising ask. I've lost count of the times I'm been told by smart, senior people with a marketing background in some famous company that the first thing <insert name of non-profit here> must do is get our name out or raise awareness of the cause. Only then should we start asking for money. So let's start with a big awareness raising campaign (hey, maybe we could get an ad agency to do it for free!)

"Sorry but that's bollocks basically. The first thing any non-profit should do is fundraise. When you fundraise you tell people about your cause, you make them care about it and they give you money as a result. And do you know what, you raise money and awareness too. It's amazing, isn't it?"

Up last: Ireland's Ask Direct founder, Damian O'Broin. He ran a real-world test.

Results? If your charity spent £500,000 on competent direct mail fundraising, you brought in 4,000 gifts. If your charity put £200,000 into awareness with the other £300,000 put into direct mail fundraising, you brought in 3,000 gifts: 25% fewer. Why would anyone do that?

"Raising awareness" is a loser's priority. "Raising awareness" is a passive, wait-and-see, hope-and-pray approach. Lazy people love it.

REAL fundraising is proactive: "Let's get to work, people! Get out there and ask!"

9. "Appeals make money. Newsletters lose money."

Answer: False

Notes and assumptions....

"Years of meager returns show that printed charity newsletters are a waste of money. They are a cost, not a profit, center."

So goes the conventional thinking. And it's utterly wrong. Take, for example, the Nashville Rescue Mission, "a Christ-centered community seeking to help the hurting of Middle Tennessee."

Every \$1 the Mission spends on publishing and mailing its monthly newsletter yields almost \$7 in gifts — a gilded return on investment (ROI) of nearly 700 percent. In 2013, the Mission's newsletter alone accounted for \$2 million in gifts.

Is Nashville's ROI a fluke? Well, it's unusually high, true. But it's far from a fluke. Nashville is just another example of a competent donor newsletter built with the Domain Formula in mind.

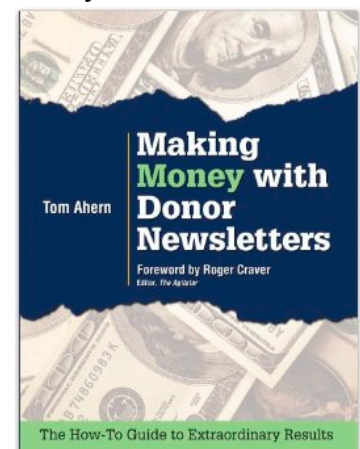
Testing by Seattle's Domain Group in the 1990s proved that a non-profit could **make just as much money from a newsletter sent to current donors as it could from its appeals**, assuming your non-profit followed the rules they established. Here's what they found:

- Competent printed newsletters sent to current donors raise \$3.33 for every dollar spent on printing, postage and other costs.
- Competent direct mail appeals sent to current donors raise \$3.22 for every dollar spent.

In other words, well-done newsletters and well-done appeals have equal pulling power. So do as many of both as you can manage.

What exactly *is* the Domain Formula ... and how do you properly apply it?

As it happens, there's a book about that. In that book you will find some surprises. Did you know, for instance, that mailing a properly done donor newsletter in an envelope typically raises far more money than sending the very same donor newsletter as a self-mailer? Here's the data, supplied by Jeff Brooks in 2013:⁷



⁷ As with all things in direct mail, testing is best practice. Charities have tested the envelope vs. self-mailer part of the Domain Formula for a couple of decades now. I've heard of just one instance where a self-mailer brought in just as much money.

10. Which are better, stats or stories?

Answer: Depends on your audience

Notes and assumptions....

Some funding sources *want* stats, *need* stats, and have the paid staff to correctly interpret your stats: governments and big foundations. For individual donors, though, it's a very different story.

Let's get a little technical.

Here's Professor Paul J. Zak writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, in an Oct. 28, 2014 article titled "Why Your Brain Loves Good Storytelling":

"Many business people have already discovered the power of storytelling in a practical sense – they have observed how compelling a well-constructed narrative can be. But recent scientific work is putting a much finer point on just how stories change our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors....

"By taking blood draws before and after the narrative, we found that character-driven stories do consistently cause oxytocin synthesis." [Oxytocin is a neurochemical that motivates us to cooperate.] "Further, the amount of oxytocin released by the brain predicted how much people were willing to help others; for example, donating money to a charity associated with the narrative."

Stories do that. Statistics don't.

In fact, according to the laboratory, the whole "statistics vs. stories" debate is pointless. And yet it's harder to kill than an urban legend. Maybe it all seems so obvious: "Some people like stories. Some people like numbers." Stories, numbers: even-steven.

But even-steven is not true with individual donors.

Correctly, it should be stated: "ALL individual donors like stories" — there's feel-good neurochemistry involved after all — "and a few individual donors like numbers, too."

That's the brain's true state. Storytelling — narrative, if you prefer a fancier name — is universal. It has been more important to human evolution than opposable thumbs, as Lisa Cron points out in her excellent book, *Wired for Story: The Writer's Guide to Using Brain Science to Hook Readers from the Very First Sentence*.

Story: it is how we learn most of what we know.

In three words, when you're fundraising with individuals: (1) emotions (2) totally (3) rule

In a contest between two competent appeals for the same charity, one "well reasoned" vs. one that's packed with emotional hooks ... well, it's not even a contest, really. The *emotional* appeal will outperform the *rational* appeal by many multiples. Every time. Guaranteed.

Why? Because of the brain's hard-wiring.

With the advent of Functional MRIs and other investigative tools in the late 20th century, neuroscientists were finally able to directly observe a phenomenon they'd suspected for more than a century: the dominance of emotion in human decision-making.

As USC neuroscientist Dr. Antoine Bechara sums it up, "[T]here is a popular notion, which most of us learn from early on in life, that logical, rational calculation forms the basis of sound decisions. Many people say, 'emotion has no IQ'; emotion can only cloud the mind and interfere with good judgment. But ... these notions [are] wrong and [have] no scientific basis." Instead, "decision-making is a process guided by emotions."

As the New York Times reported back in 2007, "A bevy of experiments in recent years suggest that the conscious mind is like a monkey riding a tiger of subconscious decisions and actions in progress, frantically making up stories about being in control."

Charity is no different

Making a gift to charity is a decision to act: a purchase decision prompted by empathy, desire, pleasure, anger, a host of other emotions; psychologists have delineated more than 100 states in the human emotional pantry.

Action is what charities above all want!

But, trying to cause action using reason, bangs on the wrong door.

Top neurological researcher, Donald B. Calne, explains it this way: "The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action while reason leads to conclusions."

In other words, your reasoning might get me *thinking*. But it's your ability to touch my emotions that gets me *giving*. That's why you always lead with emotion in appeals to individual donors, and follow with reason; not the reverse.

Tina Cincotti summed up the science nicely. "People act because you moved them emotionally -- you made them feel something. MRIs show that it's our brain's emotional nerve center that gets activated first. It's not a rational, logical process where we weigh costs against benefits and make an informed decision. Your brain gets involved later, largely as a rubber stamp to make sure you don't do anything too wacky! But it starts with the heart. If you're not hitting your donors on an emotional level, then you're not raising as much money as you could."

International marketing guru, Seth Godin, agrees. "Marketers don't convince. Engineers convince. Marketers persuade. Persuasion appeals to the emotions and to fear and to the imagination. Convincing requires a spreadsheet or some other rational device. If you're spending a lot of your time trying to convince people, it's no wonder it's not working."

The last word goes to Paul Slovic, a prominent psychologist. His research into "psychic numbing" found that big numbers tend to reduce response. Not as many act.

Slovic wrote⁸, "Most people are caring and will exert great effort to rescue individual victims whose needy plight comes to their attention. These same good people, however, often become numbly indifferent to the plight of individuals who are 'one of many....'"

Why does this occur? He concluded, "The reported numbers of deaths represent dry statistics, 'human beings with the tears dried off,' that fail to spark emotion or feeling and thus fail to motivate action."

When you communicate with individual donors — whether it's in your appeals, newsletters, website, emails, Facebook postings — avoid stats, embrace stories. Jeff Brooks writing in *Future Fundraising Now*, January 12, 2016, says: "Here are some common mistakes [adopted from PhilanTopic] that drain emotion from messages:

- Mistakenly assume that every person is an expert.
- Ignore the emotional appeal of their brand.
- Put too much emphasis on the 'investment.'
- Tries to sell an idea instead of impact.

Here are some others that I often encounter:

- You think you can instruct people into caring.
- You think emotion is somehow dishonestly manipulative.
- Your primary goal is to feel good about what you say and how you say it.
- 'Dignity' is extremely important to you.
- Political correctness."

Jeff concludes: "Fundraising that works is emotional. It's simplistic, blatant, corny, and soupy. That's just the way it is. There's nothing wrong with your donors. That's just the playground you're playing on when you do fundraising."

You will encounter staff who feel that "simplistic, blatant, corny, and soupy" fundraising is somehow manipulative, hence unethical. They are wrong (if loud). Their untrained opinions are irrelevant professionally (if loud). And they may be dangerous to your bottom line if you cave to them (so zip up).

11. How many charities will a typical donor support in a year?

Answer: 5 or more

Notes and assumptions....

⁸ Paul Slovic, *Judgment and Decision Making*, April 2007

Research published in *Iceberg Philanthropy*⁹ found that the largest group, almost half of Canadian direct mail donors, gave to between six and 10 charities a year. More than a third of respondents reported giving to more than 20 charities in a year. The US philanthropic marketplace is similar.

Here's the take-away: you share *your* "average donor" with a lot of other charities. You do not have an exclusive. And every year, new charities come knocking on your donor's door, begging for support. The number of charities in the United States has almost doubled in something like 15 years.

How can you compete successfully? Be very good at things other charities are generally poor at: thanking and reporting.

12. How quickly should you thank a new donor?

Answer: Within 48 hours

Notes and assumptions....

In 2011, Damian O'Broin, founder and manager of Ask Direct in Ireland made a presentation in The Netherlands, at the global IFC conference. He shared some startling research from McConkey Johnston International UK (now the Christian Fundraising Consultancy).

The research found that first-time donors who received a personal thank you within 48 hours were 4 times more likely to give again.

Yes: thanking in 48 hours = 400% improvement in renewal rates.

First-time donors are ardent. But that ardor cools fast if you don't sustain it.

It's like a campfire ignited by match from tinder. You nurse it. You feed it oxygen, blowing across it. A super-quick thanks does the same: it blows oxygen across an ardent new donor, keeping that small flame alive, excited by your mission. Your vision. Your potential IN THEIR LIVES. At the very least, a super-quick thanks gets your organization past what often happens in the same 48-hour period: buyer's remorse.

Look, the standard for thanking in the nonprofit world has fallen so low that *any* unusual gratitude on your part will probably net you far more friends. As The Agitator reported in 2013, "A three-minute thank-you phone call will boost first-year [donor] retention by 30%."

The ghastly truth is that most charities thank poorly (if at all). They predictably, relentlessly, remorsefully, and (let's hope) unwittingly, UNDERwhelm their donors.

Be the "OVERwhelmer" instead. Your charity will reap rich rewards.

There are just three things that underpin a successful donor communications program: (1) You ask for my help. (2) You thank me for my help. (3) You report to me what you did with my help and that of other donors.

⁹ p81, *Iceberg Philanthropy: Unlocking Extraordinary Gifts from Ordinary Donors*; Fraser Green, Ruth McDonald, Jose van Herpt; 2007, The FLA Group

13. Should you include an "ask" in your thank-you letter?

Answer: Dealer's choice

Notes and assumptions....

Lisa Sargent, a specialist on thanking, says, as a rule, "never, ever, include an ask in a thank you. And never, ever, include a donation reply slip." However, "I reserve the right to change my mind based on results."

Jeff Brooks has had different results. "We've found," he wrote in 2014, "that it's BEST to include a reply coupon in receipts (plus a return envelope). It dramatically increases response, which leads to better retention. The thing NOT to do is use standard ask techniques, like sad stories, negative photos, urgency, etc. The tenor of the package must be thankfulness and good news. The ask is just 'My next gift.' You're talking to someone who really gets it, and is emotionally well positioned to give again."

Lisa continues to test her "never" premise, but so far it's held up with her clients. One client does add a Business Reply Envelope to every thank you, as a convenience if someone wishes to send a check. But there is no reply device with the envelope, nor does the thank you letter ask for a gift.

Like Lisa, keep an open mind. Angel Aloma, executive director at Food for the Poor, reports, "On average, we get more than one fifth of our net income from direct mail from our thank you letters...." Like Lisa, he does not make an ask in these letters; but he does include an envelope and a reply device.

In 2012, Angel ran a test with 50,000 of that charity's top donors:

- 25,000 received an extra thank you at the beginning of the year. This mailing was a simple expression of gratitude for past generosity. There was no ask or reply device included.
- 25,000 did NOT receive this extra thanks.

Twelve months later, Angel reviewed the results.

Both groups had given the same number of gifts. But, tantalizingly, the group that received the extra thank-you note was more generous. That group gave almost \$450,000 more in total during the year than the group that did not receive the extra thank you.

14. Which will raise more money?

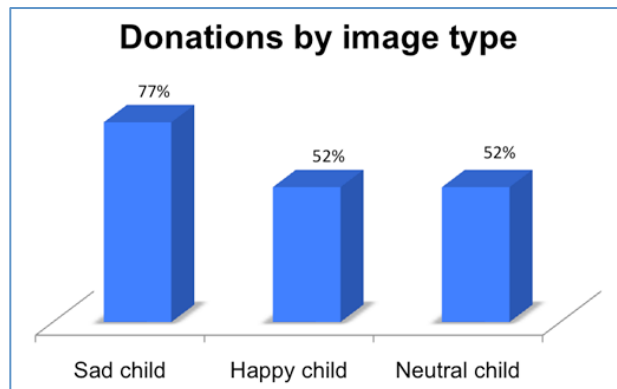
Answer: Pictures of sad kids

Notes and assumptions....

This is a question you can easily get both right *and* wrong.

Your gut tells you that sad kids probably raise more money. But then your mind reasons, "Yeah, but if we show real-life happy kids, donors will see that our programs are successful."

Makes perfect sense. Yet it's not even close. Consider this research from the American Marketing Association 2011 Journal of Marketing Research, reported by Jeff Brooks:



In other words, a photo of a sad child, like Jenny (below), will likely raise 50% more than a photo of a happy or neutral child. Agency: Ask Direct, Ireland.



There's a biological reason why bad images raise more money.

We all have a lump of neurons popularly called "the lizard brain." It's early software. It was wired in at the start of the human evolutionary journey.

When we blinked primordial mud from our eyes, two alarming thoughts dominated our primitive processors, both survival messages:

(1) "Can I eat it?"

(2) "Will it kill me?"

In your modern skull and mine, that original "lizard brain" has become what science calls *the amygdala* (pronounced "ah-MIG-duh-la"; named for its almond-ish shape).

"Shown to play a key role in the processing of emotions, the amygdala [a cluster of neurons] ... is linked to both fear responses and pleasure," Science Daily says. And here's a fun fact: "Its size is positively correlated with aggressive behavior across species. In humans, it ... shrinks by more than 30% in males upon castration." Food for thought, peaceniks.

As NYU neuroscientist, Joseph LeDoux, states in *Emotionomics*, "Negative emotions are linked to survival — and are much stronger." I hope you smell as much opportunity as I do in Dr. LeDoux's statement.

Steven Screen, principal at Seattle-based The Better Fundraising Co., owns more than 20 years of successful fundraising experience. His clients range from WorldVision to Food For The Hungry to Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation.

Steven follows a **simple guideline**: use negative imagery in your appeals; use positive imagery in your newsletters.

Negative imagery drives giving.

Positive imagery reassures donors that something good has happened.

15. Which kind of household is most likely to leave a bequest to charity?

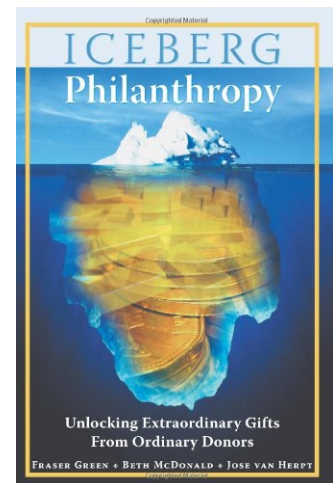
Answer: Middle class

Notes and assumptions....

The following bit of vital research appears on page 80 of *Iceberg Philanthropy*. It's part of the profile of "Jacqueline," the "average" North American donor discussed in great detail and depth by this remarkable (yet underappreciated) book.

"Jacqueline is typical of those donors who send your organization \$35 cheques through the mail. She's the classic ordinary donor.... Your major gift officer pays no attention to donors like Jacqueline. Nor does your planned giving officer."¹⁰

The fact that Jacqueline remains invisible to most nonprofit organizations, even though "she might well have been giving to you consistently for 10 or 20 years," means, as *Iceberg*



¹⁰ p77, *Iceberg Philanthropy: Unlocking Extraordinary Gifts from Ordinary Donors*; Fraser Green, Ruth McDonald, Jose van Herpt; 2007, The FLA Group

Philanthropy hammers home, that you're probably ignoring most of your best prospects for a bequest.

As Good Works, a fundraising consultancy in Canada, notes, "Legacy marketing ... is about getting a small number of very large gifts from your 'average' donors. These are the donors who aren't on your radar screen already, who aren't interested in tea and banana bread with a planned giving officer, but who are very loyal to your cause."

The truth is, you already know who your best bequest prospects are. They're the donors on your database who give to you faithfully. They're the donors on your database who give you larger than average gifts each year.

You just have to surmount one simple communications obstacle. Asked why they hadn't yet put a gift in their wills, donors will commonly say, "It didn't occur to me to do so."

Make sure it occurs to them. Legacy marketing specialist, Richard Radcliffe, says the best, basic approach is to mail your bequest prospects a brief letter once a year, reminding them that can make a spectacular difference by adding a gift in their will.

16. "If we educate our donors about the work, they'll give us more."

Answer: False

Notes and assumptions....

When charities try to "educate" donors, the approach generally is "we, the authorities, teach; you, the unaware, learn."

Which ends up being, as you might imagine, either a big bore or a bit offensive.

The assumption goes something like this: *New donors come in pretty uninformed about our important work. If we can teach them more about it, they'll come to admire it, understand it, and hence contribute more.*

In Meritocracy 101, that assumption makes perfect sense. In Real Life 101, it's a strategy for starvation.

Look, the plain truth is, if your organization could cure cancer with a magic wand, your donors would be delighted. The details of the science simply wouldn't matter. Donors care about fixing a problem. They don't much care how you do it. They don't need to know the name of the program. They don't need to know how the program works. They don't need to know all the data associated with the program. All they really need to know is that you have a program. And the program works.

The path to donor nirvana begins when you accept this humbler precept: "The organization is irrelevant. Our impact is the only thing that really counts." People aren't giving to you. They're giving *through* you, to make something happen, a point superstar fundraising consultant Tom Suddes has been making for years.

Richard Radcliffe is a UK-based researcher. He's personally interviewed more than 17,000 donors, asking them about their deeper motivations for giving. His conclusion? "Donors are spectacularly ignorant of the causes they support." But he didn't mean that was a bad thing. On the contrary; he meant, "Lucky us!" We don't have to explain very much to win someone's support for our cause. Donors may be "ignorant" of how a charity does its work. But donors have in abundance their own personal values, interests, beliefs, connections, experiences, upbringing, lost loves, secret passions, regrets, fears, angers, hopes and built-in empathy; unless you're a psychopath, empathy is part of human programming.

Rather than educate donors about your work, take them on a journey.

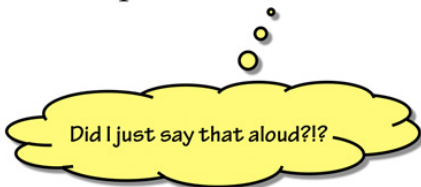
Ditch the data and the dry details. Tell stories instead. When you take donors on a never-ending journey to witness fascinating (or appalling) things, donors tend to remain with a cause longer, Adrian Sargeant's research has found.

17. Who's the real hero in fundraising communications (appeals, newsletters, website, etc.)?

Answer: The donor

Notes and assumptions....

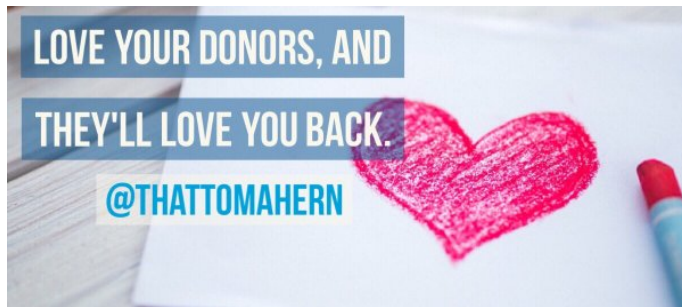
"Skip to the good part ...
the part about ME."



I pay attention to what interests me. And what interests me most is me. Ask anyone. Most charities I encounter get this notion exactly backwards. They assume that it's critically important to explain how great their programs are, as a precursor to giving. And it's not a wrong assumption, exactly. As a donor, I do have to trust you.

But it's an insufficient assumption. As researcher Dr. Adrian Sargeant wrote in January 2016 in a study, "...once donors are in a relationship with a charity, their focus shifts from what the charity does for its beneficiaries...to how the relationship makes them feel (during retention/stewardship)."

Or as Josh Hirsch illustrated the idea:



The following is a striking example of how much more money you can make by switching from "organization-centric" to "donor-centric" communications.

In 2008, the foundation at Gillette Children's hospital in St. Paul, MN changed a few key things in its print donor newsletter.

The newsletter was mailed quarterly to about 20,000 addresses. And for years, it had lost serious money, racking up an annual net loss of \$40,000. With every issue mailed, a mere \$5,000 came back in gifts, not enough to cover printing and postage, much less staff time.

This was a typical front-page headline, focused on how great the medicine is:



And then the foundation tried something different, mailed to the very same folks.

The team followed the Domain Formula to a "T." And while the hospital's world-class medicine still made appearances in the articles, the headlines were reserved for thanking and admiring the donors. Instead of being institutional in tone, the newsletter got warm and personal. The word "you" appeared everywhere.

This was the new front-page headline, focused on making donors feel good:



It was a risky experiment with many internal doubters. What happened?

Between one issue and the next, giving prompted by the newsletter soared 1,000%.

Instead of receiving the usual \$5,000 per issue, the Gillette foundation saw \$50,000 come back in the mail thanks to its new approach. And that wasn't a one-time spike, either: revenue remained at the \$50,000 level every issue ... as long as the foundation kept the focus on the donor and didn't slip back into its old, institutional ways.

As best-selling marketing expert, Seth Godin, insists: "The story's about the donor." He points out that "every time someone donates to a good cause, they're buying a story, a story that's worth more than the amount they donated. It might be the story of doing the right thing, or fitting

in, or pleasing a friend or honoring a memory, but the story has value. For many, it's the story of what it means to be part of a community."

20. Who should approve donor communications (appeals, newsletters, etc.)?

Answer: Director of development (i.e., the chief fundraiser)

Notes and assumptions....

In a responsibly managed nonprofit, only one person exercises final approval over fundraising and donor communications: the director of development.

It's her neck on the line, after all. It's her responsibility to raise the money. And she will be judged on her ability to do so. Therefore, every tool she needs to complete that assignment (direct mail appeals, newsletters, etc.) must be under her exclusive control. I repeat: her EXCLUSIVE control ... without the second-guessing of an untrained board or boss.

And yet the number one complaint I hear from the fundraisers I'm trying to train is this: "My boss won't let me do it that way!" Some real-life examples:

- "My boss insists on writing all the appeals himself. And he's boring!"
- "The archdiocese says we shouldn't spend money on a newsletter because it shows poor stewardship of donor resources."
- "My boss says our donors are unique, so normal rules don't apply."
- "My boss told me the switch to emailed newsletters exclusively because nobody reads print anymore."
- "My headmaster won't let me use a P.S. in an appeal. He says it's undignified."
- "My boss heard me out. Then he told me, and I quote, 'Sorry. That's not how we do things here.' At least he said he was sorry."
- "My board chair insisted I take out the indents. He thinks they're un-businesslike."
- "The board chair said he never reads anything longer than a one-page letter, so that's what he insists on."

I'm picking on men a little bit because most of the fundraisers who complain to me are female and most of their bosses seem to be male.

But of course members of BOTH genders (who *are* you people?) eagerly practice the ugly, ignorant, school-yard, immature, insecure, discriminatory, power-pathetic, bullying, dispiriting, demoralizing, disheartening, disillusioning, frustrating, soul-crushing management flaw of second-guessing your professional staff.¹¹

¹¹ Dear readers, forgive me. It had to be said, to put down the outlaws. I know full well that you don't inflict cruelty such as this on "your" professional fundraising staff.

The fundraiser's job is to know and deploy as well as she can the relevant "body of knowledge." Responsible fundraising professionals learn new stuff all the time. I read two hours a day at a minimum. So do others who want to succeed spectacularly.

If you're a boss or board member, feel free to SUGGEST ideas, especially if your fundraiser asks for your opinion. But do not undermine your fundraiser's confidence by insisting she do what you tell her to do. When you second-guess, you're in effect saying, "I don't trust your judgment. I suspect you're ignorant." You'll soon be searching for a new development director if that's what you exude.

The 2013 report, *UnderDeveloped*¹², highlighted a growing crisis in America's fundraising profession: the turnover among development directors is high (staying in a fundraising job less than 2 years is typical), positions remain vacant forever, and candidates for senior positions are few and far between. The report found distrust and despair on both sides. A majority of executive directors surveyed were dissatisfied with their directors of development. A majority of fundraisers surveyed disliked their bosses.

Some of this, I believe, can be traced to second-guessing. If a chief fundraiser worries MORE about pleasing the boss or board than about the intricacies of raising money, the fundraising function cannot thrive.

If you are the boss, invest in your fundraisers. Training works. A study released in 2016 by Dr. Adrian Sargeant and major gifts consultant Amy Eisenstein found that every time a fundraiser attends any competent training—conference, webinar, whatever—the charity realized an added \$37,000 in income that year. Pay \$3,000 for an international conference? Raise another \$37,000 on average. Pay \$99 for a webinar? Raise another \$37,000 on average.

Final note, Dear Boss: If the stuff your fundraiser wants to send out makes you nervous, that's a good sign. As copywriter Jeff Brooks notes: "Good fundraising makes insiders uncomfortable. They are not the correct audience."

The most reliable signal of ultimate success I know is this: if the executive director and board chair hate and fear what I've written, then I know I have a winner.

¹² *UnderDeveloped Report: A National Study of Challenges Facing Nonprofit Fundraising*; January 2013; conducted by CompassPoint and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr., Fund.