

Why do Fundraisers Think Money is Scarce?

As fundraisers, you and I understand the importance of generating revenue to support our missions. We worry about people who may be turned away if we fail to achieve our goals. This culture of scarcity permeates many nonprofits – an approach based on FEAR – False Evidence Appearing Real.

Individuals and corporations donate billions of dollars to charity each year so why do we worry about scarcity?

Perhaps because we spend too little time understanding donors' needs *and too much time talking about our own.*

- What if we aimed to help people achieve their philanthropic goals rather than meeting our fundraising quotas?
- What if we allowed donors' interests to influence the way we work?
- What if we operated from a philosophy of abundance instead of scarcity?

Years ago I began meeting with a donor who made a one-time gift of \$100. Without prospect research tools or easy Internet searches, I didn't know his interests or capacity. As a "major" donor to this fledgling organization I invited him to meet for coffee. We talked about his family, how his gift had been used, and his favorite charities. He gave me a check for \$500. We'd meet every quarter and each time he'd make a gift more sizable than the last. At our final meeting for the year he handed me a check.

"I can't accept this now," I said. "I want YOU – ALL of you, not just your money! Come and see what your gift is doing before you give me another dime."

He looked at me in shock. "Nobody has ever refused my money... *When can we go?*"

I listened to all the things he expected to see, his plans to solve the problem of poverty through his gifts, his plans to teach our people how to be self-sufficient. I just smiled.

For three days we travelled the community, visiting barefoot children in tin shacks, meeting people who hadn't eaten a proper meal in days, touring the primary school – a 50 year old building in shambles with plumbing that barely functioned, high rates of absenteeism and disciplinary problems, and pitiful academic performance. He had never

spent time with people suffering the indignity of poverty. He was stunned by their gifts of hospitality and optimism though their daily life seemed miserable. When it was time to leave, he wept because he'd made new friends.

“It was so much easier to write a check,” he said. “This experience makes me question the way I live. I came here to help people. Instead they helped me.”

I could have talked about the plans we had for the school or the need to feed hungry children and pensioners. Instead I listened. He talked about growing up in a low-income neighborhood. Sports kept him out of trouble, taught him discipline, teamwork, and the value of ambition.

“What you need is a sports program for these kids, to keep them out of trouble!”

Seriously??? We needed to feed children so they could learn, repair the school so it was safe, install security to keep the gangs out, provide tutoring and counseling, and feed pensioners. I thought about trying to convince him to fund our priorities. Instead I asked how he would run a sports program there. We figured out how much it would cost.

“You hire the coaches, buy the equipment, and I’ll pay for it.”

Fantastic! I’d scored a five digit recurring gift for a program we didn’t need!

We launched the sports program and amazing things happened. Children were more attentive in class, disciplinary problems dropped sharply, students developed a sense of pride in their school, and the community rallied around to cheer them on.

And we met other donors who had hearts for feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and construction.

Six years later, he’s still underwriting the sports program and made additional major gifts to capital campaigns. He celebrates the changes he sees in our children, reminiscing about the difference sports made in his life. He’s made many trips with friends and felt disappointed when some of them didn’t become donors. We’ve shown him that immersion experiences affect people differently. The friends that did not become our supporters are more involved in their favorite charities. Whether the fruits of our labor inspire people to work in our vineyard or somewhere else, the world benefits from increased philanthropy. Perhaps another, even smaller organization, will receive the funding it needs to grow.

This is what happens when we replace a culture of fear with a culture of abundance.

We become willing to be vulnerable – open to the ideas and interests of donors. We see ourselves as facilitators of giving and enjoy helping individuals achieve their philanthropic dreams.

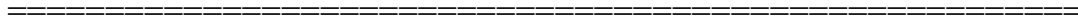
We raise more money than we ever thought possible because we make donors feel like valued partners and insiders rather than ATM machines.

We attract more donors and supporters because our philosophy of abundant living distinguishes us from other nonprofits plagued by a culture of scarcity.

Throughout my career, I've seen this story replayed many times. Different donors, different interests, different organizations.

One thing is clear, when you operate from a philosophy of abundance, your fundraising revenues surge.

Take a risk. Try it. And see what a difference it makes.



Rachel Ramjattan, CFRE is a veteran fundraiser with more than 20 years fundraising experience. A former computer engineer she specializes in donor communications, nonprofit technology, social media, and grant writing. About Rachel Ramjattan, CFRE Rachel has worked in the nonprofit sector for more than 20 years after beginning her career as a computer engineer. She is the president and principal of Nonprofit Plus, LLC, a fundraising consulting firm dedicated to helping you get better at doing good. She's also a passionate Donor Path Solutions Expert who enjoys helping others raise money for their causes.

Instructions

Circulate this article amongst your team members and give them time to read it. Once everyone has had the time to digest it, ask these questions:

1. How did this article make you feel? Did it bring up any fears for you?
2. Would you have had the courage to do what Rachel did? Do you think what she did was right?
3. What if we aimed to help people achieve their philanthropic goals rather than meeting our fundraising quotas?
4. What if we allowed donors' interests to influence the way we work?
5. What if we operated from a philosophy of abundance - instead of scarcity?