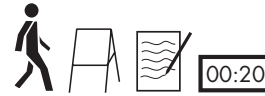


Six-Word Stories



Ernest Hemingway is said to have written the most famous six-word story: “For sale: baby shoes. Never worn.” Indeed, these six words tell a sad tale succinctly and powerfully.

It’s not easy to write a great six-word story but given a few minutes most people can come up with a pretty good one. Off the top of our heads, here’s an example: “Learned how to ask. Watch out!” Or how about “Wanted: Fundraising chairman. Ours won’t ask.”

Why Do This Exercise?

Fundraising is storytelling—make every word count

Use This Exercise When

You want to end a meeting or training session on a note of creativity

Time Required

If you’re disciplined, about 20 minutes

Audience

All participants in your fundraising campaign: some combination of board, staff, and volunteers

Setting

A room with enough wall or window space to post several sheets of flip chart paper

Materials

- Flip chart paper and markers
- Paper and pens
- Tape (unless you’re using self-stick flip chart paper)

FACILITATING THE EXERCISE

1. Ask if anyone has ever heard a six-word story. Write Hemingway’s famous example—“For sale: baby shoes. Never worn.”—on a flip chart. Ask for opinions about what makes it effective.
2. Hand out a piece of paper to everyone and ask the group to write a six-word story about why your organization matters. Give them no more than two minutes.
3. While they’re writing, post a few pages of flip chart paper on the wall. Post enough sheets so that everyone can write their stories; assume each page will include three or four stories.

4. As people finish, ask them come to the front of the room, take a marker, write their story, and return to their seats.
5. Once all the stories are written, ask each person to read his or hers, going around the room or the table in order.
6. To debrief this exercise, ask the following questions:
 - Which stories appealed to you? Why?
 - What did the most effective stories have in common?
 - Do these stories reveal any message we might use in our donor communications?
7. Collect the stories and recruit someone to compile and distribute them to the participants as a follow-up to the exercise.

We thank our colleague Paula Peter of The Solstice Group for sharing this exercise.

TRAINING TIP Novice trainers sometimes worry their group won't rise to the challenges offered by these exercises. But almost without exception, the people you train will be creative and smart beyond your expectations. As long as you provide the context for the exercise, clear instructions, and the right amount of time (sometimes less time is better than more), a group can accomplish great objectives.