



Tracks to Success - A Weekly Primer on Grants Development

Re-Igniting the Passion for Your Mission

by Terry Axelrod, CEO Raising More Money

Part Four - Zero in on Your Emotional Hook

How does your organization change the lives of real people? Use stories to communicate that, and you will make an emotional impression that people will never forget.

Many people we work with find that re-igniting their passion comes from learning to tell the story of their organization powerfully—the story that really strikes a chord with people. The kind of story that people can't forget, like the story of the woman born without legs and an arm that ends at the elbow who felt empowered by a local Easter Seals group to overcome the limitations of her disability. Or the cat who was left at an animal shelter for four months and was so grateful for being adopted that it acts like a mother to orphaned kittens.

Take a moment here to think about your own giving. Think about the organizations you feel really wonderful about supporting. Do you feel emotionally connected to their work? Odds are, you do—and that's why you want to support them year after year.

Emotion is the golden nugget of any introduction to your organization because it connects potential donors deeply to your cause. All the facts in the world, alone, won't get us to give our biggest gift. Something's got to pull at our heartstrings.

Take the time to discover what it is about your cause that really hooks people, that calls them to become involved and stay involved. Then, incorporate this into every aspect of your communications with people in your community.

Rest assured, every cause has an emotional connection to make. For a camp or college, this may be nostalgia. For an environmental group, it may be the dream of leaving our grandchildren a healthy planet.

Still struggling? Try getting a small group together to discuss the following questions. They will help you clarify your unique emotional connection.

What originally moved you about the mission of the organization? Why did you decide to get involved in the first place? Briefly share your stories. They will re-inspire you. You will see common threads.

What cherished cultural values and ideals does your organization deal with?

Why do people say they want to be involved with your organization? What moves them enough to give their time or money?

There's always a way to relate your mission to the changed life of one individual or family, even if you're dealing with an abstract policy issue. Take it back to a core human emotion that stirs people.

The easiest way to show the emotional impact of your work is through stories. Long after they forget specific facts, people will remember a story. Help your group zero in on your "Essential Story."

The Essential Story is the archetypal story that conveys the emotional essence of your work powerfully—each time it is told. It may be a true story about one particular person or group, or it may be a composite of several stories of real people whose lives have been changed by your organization. This story should move you every time you tell it.

The Essential Story has three distinct stages:

Stage 1: The "Before" Stage

Choose one person's story, give the person a fictitious name, and briefly describe in vivid language his situation before he came in contact with your group.

Stage 2: The "Intervention"

What specific services or support did she receive from you? What was your personal observation of her at that time?

Stage 3: The "After" Stage

What are the results of the intervention? How has life changed for this person? What is now possible for him? What does this person now say about his or her life? How is she giving back to others?

Take the time to write out and practice telling this story. Of course, this does not preclude you from using other stories as well. It just gives you a fail-proof fall-back story that everyone from your organization can use to successfully convey the emotional essence of your work.

Letters of appreciation and live testimonials add depth and credibility to the third-person stories you will be telling. The combination of third-person stories, letters, live testimonials, photos, and/or audiotape will ensure that you get your message across.

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This is the second in a six-part series on "Re-Igniting the Passion for Your Mission" by Terry Axelrod, founder and CEO of Raising More Money Inc., a Seattle-based organization that has trained and coached more than 2,000 nonprofits in a system for building sustainable funding from individual donors. [Click here](#) for more information.