



The Moral Case for Promotion

Marketing isn't just good for your organization. It's the right thing to do.

BY MICHAEL LEVINE

You probably remember the admonition delivered at many family dinner tables: “Finish your meal. There are children starving in China. It’s a sin to waste food.”

A sin to waste food? As teenagers, we were usually tempted to roll our eyes when we heard that lecture.

But on reflection, it isn’t absurd. If you think about the depth of deprivation in some parts of the world, it is not hyperbole to say there is something immoral when those of us with more resources waste them.

The same logic applies to charitable work. If you have a project that can make the world a better place, then surely it’s wrong—in fact, sinful—to waste it. Not only is there a moral argument for promoting humanitarian projects, it is immoral *not* to promote them.

To support this proposition, here is a PR moral manifesto for nonprofits. It contains 10 commandments:

1. Thou Shalt Overcome Neurotic Humility about Promotion.

C.S. Lewis said, “Every virtue, taken to extremes, has the potential to become a vice.” So it is with humility about promoting good deeds.

“There is indeed a moral case for self-promotion,” says Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. “If the pur-

pose you have in mind is to do a good deed, then you do the public a favor by bringing it to their attention.”

Robert Schuller, pastor of the Crystal Cathedral in southern California, agrees. “We live in a world where people are overwhelmed with messages,” he says. “You have to take special steps to make sure yours gets through. You have a duty to do so—if you truly believe in your cause.”

Dr. Schuller sees a very practical case for being a promoter: “Some universal principles apply to charitable works as much as to any other kind of enterprise,” he says. “I’m talking about basic rules of management and business. First, you don’t go into a business enterprise, be it secular or religious or charitable, unless there’s a need to be filled.

“Second, you have to have a response to that need.

“And third, you’ve got to be willing and able to let people know that you’re there, that you’ve got what they need. That’s promotion, and it’s as much a part of a successful enterprise as good motives and smart management.” Public relations “is so extremely important that to neglect it

is to allow yourself to be delinquent, to underperform for those you’re supposed to be serving.”

2. Thou Shalt Get Thy Head Out of the Clouds.

Many nonprofits are forced to rely on the efforts of “people of good heart” to accomplish their mission. This often means that they don’t have consistent professional management or financial guidance to help them maximize their effectiveness. Using a bevy of volunteers and sometimes a revolving door of leadership, these organizations seem to succeed solely by keeping their eye on the cause, without regard for their operational efficiency. Unfortunately, this is why so many nonprofits fail or achieve only a portion of what they set out to accomplish.

Robert Sirico, a Catholic priest and president of the Acton Institute, a think tank studying the intersection between social values and economic issues, talks about the failure of small nonprofits to market themselves in these terms: “I think some nonprofits are so intent about their mission that they neglect the practical necessities

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of finance and promotion. Their heads are a bit too much in the clouds, you might say.”

Bringing your head out of the clouds means learning to think like an entrepreneur. It means paying as much attention to your operational efficiency as any business. And one major element of this is learning to use public relations to your best advantage.

3. Thou Shalt Remember that People Love to Give—and Give to Love.

Dr. Leo Buscaglia reminds us that charity is one of the most important gestures humans can make to experience love. He says, “Only when we give joyfully, without hesitation or thought of gain, can we truly know what love means. To learn how to give is one of the most important aspects of human behavior and human development.”

Buscaglia is adamant that nonprofits have an obligation to make themselves known so that the world can see that they are there. “How can we get the joy of giving if we don’t know they exist, when we don’t know how wonderful is their potential to brighten the world?”

For Buscaglia, giving doesn’t just benefit the recipient. The giver also gains—perhaps even more powerfully—because, as Buscaglia says, “When you give, you get a sense of your own worth. You come to understand that through your own actions you are bettering the world. You also gain insights into others and, ultimately, into yourself.”

4. Thou Shalt Ask at Every Opportunity for Promotion of Good Works.

People doing good works often become comfortable with the idea that they need to wait before asking, like a child in an old-fashioned household. But times have changed, and so have our cultural mores. In today’s world of information over-

load, you will get lost if you don’t speak up clearly at every opportunity.

Here’s a powerful example of how promotional shyness affects one group of nonprofits. In Orange County, California, one of the nation’s wealthiest counties, you would think that the regional nonprofits might take advantage of the excellent opportunities for fundraising. Of course some of them do. But in a 1996 poll conducted by the University of California at Irvine, Professor Mark Baldasare discovered a curious fact. When asked, “How often do charities (excepting churches) ask you for money?” fewer than half the Orange County respondents answered “very often.” This was true even among respondents with incomes above \$80,000, a group that philanthropies arguably should be wooing with special vigor.

Professor Baldasare’s research seems to indicate that the public can withstand plenty of promotion from nonprofits—and they won’t complain. To be blunt, the public can stomach hearing your messages more often. So why not aim to get all the publicity you can? If you don’t ask, you won’t get.

5. Thou Shalt Believe that One Person or One Idea Can Make a Difference.

Several of the best nonprofit success stories revolve around the intense promotional efforts of a single person who did not balk about promoting a cause. Such individuals prove that when you stand up and shout, you can make a difference in the world.

One of these people is Mary Jo Copeland, who founded Sharing and Caring Hands in Minneapolis to help those who had exhausted all other avenues of hope. In one recent year, she spent 43 weekends giving speeches, raising the \$150,000 a month needed to run her organization. Her marketing verve has had staggering results. In only three years, she has raised more than \$7

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million, all from private sources, allowing her to operate a shelter and build temporary housing for the poor.

There are many stories like Mary Jo Copeland’s, of people who know how to sell goodness. Perhaps you can be one of them.

6. Thou Shalt Teach Businesses that Charity Improves Profits.

It seems logical that getting donations from businesses means that they lose money. After all, their money is now out of their account and into yours.

In a strange twist of logic, however, asking businesses for contributions actually builds their bank accounts rather than draining them. This means that you should encourage businesses to give as generously as they can—and not worry that you may be draining them financially.

How does altruism promote profit? Rabbi Daniel Lapin explains the logic this way:

Business, if it is to be dynamic and growing and successful, requires a willingness to risk, to put capital at risk in the belief that an investment in an idea or resource or human being will pay off eventually in larger revenues and a more vibrant business operation. This means that people in business cannot hoard their holdings but must be prepared to part with them in the service of the business’s growth.

Philanthropy is thus a wonderful vehicle for exercising this psychic muscle, the muscle employed when one willingly, gladly surren-



ders some of what one has. Philanthropy offers practice in the discipline of not holding on tight to all one's assets. So entrepreneurs should be on their knees giving thanks for the opportunities presented by philanthropy and for the chance to use some of their resources to help other people.

There's another benefit in getting businesses to promote charity, especially when it is done very publicly. When philanthropic efforts are advertised in public, they are more likely to be emulated. Public announcements of donations from businesses can create a dynamic society of contributors to your cause—and you can rest assured that none of them will go bankrupt because of you.

7. Thou Shalt Lead by Example.

In the words of Rabbi Daniel Lapin, "If givers want to give anonymously, every effort should be made to dissuade them from doing so, because an anonymous gift brings only half the potential good. It doesn't offer others the example of a named, identifiable person doing charity and getting deserved credit. Such examples prod others to emulate them."

Rabbi Lapin illustrates the argument by recounting a conversation he had with a minister who was complaining about his congregation's meager donations to the church. "I asked him how he was trying to improve things, and he said that every Sunday he berates the congregation for not giving more. I said, 'Why don't you try a different strategy? Why don't you tell them how grateful you are for their large donations to the church?'"

"He replied, 'But they aren't giving large donations.'

"I said, 'Even if it's not true, every person will think he or she is the only person who isn't giving substantially. You will have prodded them into generosity by encouraging them not to be outdone by others.' "

Public giving, with public credit going to the giver, has that same

Don't Be Shy. The Media Wants You.

You may not know it, but the media craves your news. In fact, without news, the media couldn't exist. It is their nourishment. They need people and organizations to feed them.

Southern California publicist Gloria Zigner points out that, by one estimate, "85% of what you read in the printed media, hear on the radio, or see on television has been planted there." Stories come from public-information officers, government-relation professionals, investor-relations specialists, volunteers working with nonprofit groups, and so on. The dynamic is shared, notes Zigner. "People call up the media and say, 'Here's an idea for a story that we think your readers or viewers will like.' "

So don't be shy about promoting your cause. Your news is wanted.

effect: It can get the best kind of competition started. Ted Turner understood this when he challenged other wealthy giants of the business world to give more to charity. You might recall that Turner even proposed that the world should have an Ebenezer Scrooge Prize for the wealthiest people who failed to contribute sufficiently and a Heart of Gold Award to honor the most generous. Turner's chiding is credited with prompting several extremely wealthy individuals such as Bill Gates and George Soros to award hundreds of millions of dollars to various good causes.

8. Thou Shalt Raise Consciousness, Which Is As Important As Raising Money.

A dollar today is worth just one dollar. But acquiring a devotee to your cause can return a lifetime of dollars and other devotees. Listen to the words of Julie Jaskol, communications director for the Los Angeles Free Clinic, an exceptional organization that offers no-cost medical care and social services: "We work very hard to market our programs and our services. We do so, obviously, to

strengthen our donor base and to draw in more volunteers.

"But marketing is important for a larger reason as well. It's important as a way of raising public consciousness about the issues we're dealing with: poverty, homelessness, AIDS, and other illnesses. We're helping educate, we hope, the larger community about the troubles that are out there and the need to get involved."

9. Thou Shalt Seek Good Reality and Good Perception.

Guy Kawasaki, the prolific writer on computers and business strategies, is right when he says that, for a PR campaign to have integrity and long-term promise, you have to be marketing something with substance. "The first step is to create a 'good reality,'" he says. "This means that your organization has to have a worthwhile mission and be executing it."

Having a good reality is only half the battle. You must also have "good perception." Today's world is based so much on appearance and thrives so much on hearsay, rumor, and distortion that, however good your reality, if it isn't perceived the right way, your cause is lost.

A recent survey of more than 1,000 Americans confirms that perception is quite relative. In this poll, people were asked to identify which conveyors of information they most trusted. Not surprisingly, the least believable sources were company spokespeople. Fewer than half (46%)

An anonymous gift brings only half the potential good.



Giving Creates Health, Too

Here's a curious fact you should consider whenever you feel uncertain about promoting your cause. Research indicates that people who routinely help others, through charity work or simple kindness, are more healthy.

So reports Ervin Staub, professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. "That's because being nice fosters a critical sense of connection with others," he says. Helping other people creates bonds. "You also gain a boost in self-esteem, which reinforces the desire to be nice again."

David Rosenhan, professor of psychology and law at Stanford University, says, "Research indicates that giving is the key to deriving benefits." There is a quantifiable, positive change in the immune system that comes with a positive interaction with other people.

Martin Selifman, author of *Learned Optimism*, attributes this phenomenon in part to the fact that people who get involved in helping projects tend to be optimists. "Optimists have better-functioning immune systems," he says, "and that helps ward off disease."

In *Living Life on Purpose*, Greg Anderson, founder of the American Wellness Project, says that altruism is actually quite good medicine. He quotes physician and psychologist George Valliant, director of a 40-year study of Harvard graduates: "[Service is] one of the qualities that helps even the most poorly adjusted men of the study group deal successfully with the stresses of life. It's service that makes the difference."

By contrast, selfishness can exact a price. Larry Scherwitz, a social psychologist at the Medical Research Institute of San Francisco, says that in a study he conducted, "the more self-centered people were much more likely to die of heart attacks than the less self-centered."

So, remember that being a hero of charitable endeavors is good for society, good for our soul and psyche, and good for the body.

of those questioned found corporate PR staffers "very" or "somewhat" believable. Spokespeople for an entire industry or trade group were deemed believable by a slightly larger number of people (49%), while 50% found word of mouth from friends to be "very" or "somewhat" trustworthy.

The most believable messengers—with a 92% favorable response—were eyewitnesses. Next most believable were independent experts (just under 90%), followed by a victim or the family of a victim (84%). Reports from journalists were considered highly believable by 65%, while 71% were prone to believe consumer advocates.

The moral of this poll? The same information carries different weight in the public's eye, based on who is reporting it. Beyond showing how perceptions can shape reality, this survey argues strongly for nonprofits

to rely on public-relations savvy because it can make a world of difference in how your message is reported. You will likely have a higher believability quotient if your message is delivered straight to the public by someone perceived as being an organizational spokesperson rather than someone with a vested interest.

10. Thou Shalt Not Be Afraid to Think Big.

Many nonprofits use publicity in ways that are small and lackluster. In today's media world, minimal efforts provoke only minimal response.

What the leaders of today's nonprofit groups need are grand visions for their organizations. This requires thinking big—and bigger and bigger. When you are creating a press release, shout from the highest mountain, not the little hill around the corner.

The rules that even small, fledgling nonprofits should live by include the following:

- **Go for fame and fortune.**

This includes both finding major supporters and planning special events. Identify people who are socially prominent—and who have social conscience—and recruit them to your cause. A local celebrity can bring you energy, connections, and overnight credibility.

- **Take your projects seriously.** Go for pomp and grandeur as much as you can. Formality and glitter impart a sense of importance and seriousness about your cause. Avoid halfway measures that belittle the importance of your goals. Your attitude toward your own projects should be as dedicated and regal as you can make them.

- **Go for mass appeal.** Fundraising works well when you can bring the community together by sponsoring a run, a walkathon, or a weekend competition of any kind. Mass appeal also helps give everyone a sense of camaraderie in a larger cause.

- **Be a hero.** Our culture is short on heroes. We need all the inspiration we can get. In that sense, we owe it to the psychic and spiritual health of society to let our organizations' stories be told and to let our light shine. ■



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