

# Three Good Things: Creating Miracles in Fund Development



**When you take time to shift the energy,  
you'll be amazed what happens.**

By Erika K. Oliver

**W**e need more money! The economy is bad! Other nonprofits get the money we used to get! Such doomsday proclamations cause negative energy, which increases stress, diminishes listening, and decreases productivity.

Doomsday proclamations also repel donations. Today's donors are looking for good news, positive outcomes. They want the results, the social changes that will occur if they provide support.

**The sad story has  
lost its appeal.**

To satisfy this new type of donor, you need to change your view of fund development from solicitation to communication. And not just any communication, but positive, proactive, outcome-driven communication.

## **Fund Development = Relationship-Building**

Fund development takes a broad view, beyond the act of raising funds. Its emphasis is on long-term, mutually beneficial relationships instead of a onetime transaction. It focuses on relationships that span the continuum from event participation and annual donations to capital campaign support and planned giving.

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Communication is the heart of these deeper relationships. Positive communication, emphasizing specific benefits to contributors, is required for these collaborative (not transactional) exchanges.

Negative, or problem, approaches must be replaced by positive tactics that support ongoing relationships. The first order of business is to instill a positive perspective in the fund developer who delivers the communication.

## **Communication Miracles**

When your organization's mission connects deeply with an individual, family, corporation, foundation, or government agency, a communication miracle has occurred. Getting your message heard as you intend, explaining your benefit to another, and asking for and receiving what you need, when and how you need it, is a miracle.

Communication miracles in fund development begin from a base

of gratitude and shared meaning. From there, you can truly listen to the needs of your potential donor and respond collaboratively. Otherwise, you're just shooting fundraising arrows and hoping they hit with no focus on long-term or deep commitment.

## **An Activity to Create the Right Energy**

Here's an activity you can do every day to create a positive energy shift. Think of three good things about your day at home and three good things you've accomplished at work. Ask others in your organization to do the same, and share your results. (See "Gratitude at Every Phase" on page 11 for ways to do so.)

"Three Good Things" is a gratitude activity that brings awareness to the positive things that happen even in adverse circumstances. When done daily, this activity generates positive energy and lays the foundation to develop an upbeat message.

The cycle of fund development includes cultivating prospects, asking for their support, and building the relationship. At each phase that you apply the "Three Good Things" activity, the relationship grows, funds are developed, and a mutually beneficial synergy is accomplished. ■



*Erika K. Oliver (erikaoliver@prodigy.net), a recovering pessimist, uses positive approaches to help organizations with a social mission create communication miracles. Erika conducts personalized training, speaks at events, and is a project consultant and author of Three Good Things (www.erikaoliver.com).*

## Three Good Things: Fund Development Stories

### Frozen Pies and a Warmed Heart

When a fund development professional asked a donor to share “three good things,” he cited “Mrs. Smith’s pies,” confessing he liked the frozen pies even better than his wife’s homemade pies. The following week, the fund development professional sent three Mrs. Smith’s pies to the donor’s office. Not only was the donor delighted, his contributions and involvement increase every year.

### Everybody Knows Our Name

A relatively unknown organization shared their “Three Good Things” with their community through media releases and public service announcements. Awareness of their programs and impact on the community grew. Attendance at their annual event (the only source of discretionary income) doubled after using these positive communication methods.

### The Board Takes Action

One nonprofit organization was growing so fast that the fund development professional could no longer generate, ask, and follow up with all the prospects on her own. She started telling board members three good things about the organization and asking them to relate three good things in return. As board members shared stories they heard about the organization’s programs and services, they became more involved. They started following up with prospects. They began connecting with friends, who soon became donors or who helped connect the organization to major funding sources. The fund development professional didn’t need to ask the board for assistance, because they were soon asking her, “How can we help?” Everyone wanted to be part of and contribute to “Three Good Things.”



## Gratitude at Every Phase

Here are just a few of the ways you and others in your organization can use the “Three Good Things” activity to raise funds, build relationships, and create success.

### Cultivating Prospects: Share Three Good Things about the Day

1. Before you begin researching prospective donors, share three good things about your work with a coworker or fund development peer. This act of gratitude focuses your energy on what is possible, not what might be difficult.

2. Before approaching a prospect, review three good things about your day to reduce any anxiety or fear you have about the interaction. Anxiety and fear make it nearly impossible to listen carefully, and you run a huge risk of missing important information about the donor’s needs and concerns.

3. When you’re building rapport at the beginning of the conversation, share one of your good things. Also ask prospects about something good that happened to them that day. Prepare for them to be pleasantly surprised. It’s not often that another person takes a genuine interest in someone’s simple experiences, and most people aren’t used to being asked about the good in their day.

### Asking for Support:

#### Share Three Good Things about Your Organization

1. Using “Three Good Things” to begin a positive relationship with prospects, you’ve been able to really listen to their needs and understand specifically how contributing to your organization will benefit them. Share three specific benefits they’ll realize when they provide support. Focus on the impact of the donation, and turn an ask from the organization into an opportunity for the donor.

2. Mentally remind yourself of three good things about your organization before making a clear and specific ask. The grateful energy you create will keep you focused on your organization’s purpose and the bigger picture of the relationship you’re developing, no matter what the prospect’s response.

3. Just 15-20 seconds of gratitude lowers your blood pressure, decreases stress hormones, and heightens productivity. Keep “Three Good Things” that your mission does for the community in front of you—on your desk, in your calendar, and on your key chain—to keep your thoughts focused on the good work. Make sure your positive energy reserves stay high so that burnout isn’t part of your reality.

### Building Relationships:

#### Share Three Good Things You & Your Organization Do

1. Plan to share three good things with each donor throughout the year. Share the good work caused by their donation, publicly recognize the relationship, and support their work or interests.

2. Begin each organizational meeting by sharing three good things each person has accomplished at work. This activity helps you appreciate all the components of your organization and understand how the mission is lived each day. It helps increase respect and support for each coworker, results in a strong team, and allows everyone in the organization to contribute to fund development efforts.

3. Share three good things with your community through local media, your organizational newsletter, and at board and community meetings. Your organization will become a source of positive energy, better known and seen as a contributor in a bigger framework. Many people keep the good news to themselves but are quick to share the bad. This generates negative energy which doesn’t result in sympathetic support but creates a distance.