

## How Well Are You Telling Your Brand Story?

What exactly is “branding”? One of the best definitions, for its power and simplicity is this: A great brand is a story well told. You tell that story through your logo, tagline, website, everything that helps people learn who you are and what you stand for. Julie Cottineau offers some tips in her book *Twist* (Panoma Press, panomapress.com):

**If you're toying with a new tagline**, try it out in your e-mail signature or e-mail subject line. Then do some trademark searches before using it more broadly.

“A great brand is a story well told.”


**Stay away from jargon, stale language, and words that are overused or pedantic.** Never use a “ten dollar word” when a “five dollar word” will do, Cottineau says. Rather than “implementing effective undertakings,” talk about “plans that get results.” Instead of “procuring achievable concepts,” say “getting good ideas.”

**Ask people outside your industry to look at your brand story.** They're likely to have the required distance to see things that you're overlooking or that you might be omitting because it feels like bragging.

To find new logo ideas, launch an online “99Designs” contest (an online crowd sourced design platform that is often very low cost). 

## Finding the Right People to Staff Your Organization

People have many reasons for joining the staff of a nonprofit organization. Recruiting and retaining the best staff – or “members,” as the authors of *Promotion, Recruitment, & Retention of Members in Nonprofit Organizations* call them – requires finding a match between the organization's financial, social, material, and human-resource needs and the assets, knowledge, and abilities that prospective staff can offer.

The book, published by Emerald Insight (emerald.com) considers how to find, cultivate, and steward staff (both paid and volunteer). It can help you find the best people and increase value in your organization's work and, ultimately, in society. 

### Promotion, Recruitment and Retention of Members in Nonprofit Organizations



Cecilia Isabel Calderón-Valencia  
Judith Cavazos-Arroyo  
Alfonso López-Lira Arjona

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

## Are you Asking the Right Questions?

We learn, connect, invent, solve mysteries, and break down barriers through the questions we ask. “Most of us don't really understand how questions work – or how to make them work for us,” says Frank Sesno, an expert on fruitful inquiry. He fills that knowledge gap with *Ask More: The Power of Questions to Open Doors, Uncover Solutions, & Spark Change* (amacombooks.org) in which he describes a variety of question types. Here are a few:

**Diagnostic questions** identify a problem and a response. **Examples:** Now what? What is the risk in moving forward? What should we be watching for?

**Strategic questions** mitigate risks. **Examples:** What's the biggest obstacle? What might go wrong? What will it take to achieve success, and what will be the cost?

**Empathy questions** break down walls, strengthen bonds, and lead to self-discovery. **Examples:** What are people feeling? Scared? Jubilant? Vulnerable? What's it like for them to be who they are?


“Most of us don't really understand how questions work.”

**Bridging questions** help you gain cooperation from the wary, the distrustful, and the hostile. **Examples:** What motivates you? What are you thinking? Do you have ideas about what should be done? Can you tell me more?

**Confrontational questions** hold people accountable for past actions. **Examples:** Were you aware that this was happening? Who was responsible? Did you think about the consequences?

**Creativity questions** get people to imagine, aim high, and soar above failure. **Examples:** What's the magic-wand idea? What would you do if you knew you could not fail?

**Mission questions** create a sense of purpose, gain supporters, and raise funds. **Examples:** What do you care about? How can we partner? How can we change the world? What's the bumper-sticker higher calling?

*Ask More* also delves into scientific questions, interview questions, entertaining questions, and legacy questions, each driven by its own approach and listening skills. It's a book for everyone with a stake in overcoming obstacles, getting along with others, meeting goals, following dreams, and finding answers that matter. 

## Communication in Times of Conflict

In *Managing Conflict: A Practical Guide to Resolution in the Workplace* (koganpage.com), David Liddle has some invaluable advice for avoiding communication breakdowns when things are tense. Here are a few of his recommendations:


**Avoid e-mailing** in the midst of a conflict. It's hard to convey subtle emotions or give nuanced feedback unless you meet face to face.

**Never send an angry e-mail.** If you have the urge to do so, Liddle has this wise counsel: Instead of writing the e-mail, put the kettle on, drink two cups of tea, and then ask the person to get together for a chat.

**Meet in a quiet place.** Noise and distractions can muddle communication and escalate conflict.

**Make an agreement that you'll avoid interrupting.** Give each person time to finish a complete thought.

**At the end** of the conversation, summarize it to be sure you've heard correctly and haven't missed anything important.

**Thank your conversational partners** for sharing their thoughts. Affirm that what they've said is valuable. 

## Teach People Not Just “How to Do” But Also “How to Think”

With the increased complexity of today's workplace, employees must be able to adapt and add value to the organization. Michael Vaughan calls such employees Value Workers. He explains, in *The Thinking Effect* (thethinkingeffect.com), how you can help people become Value Workers by going beyond skill training to focus on Core Abilities and Value Skills.

The three Core Abilities are:

1. **Think** critically.
2. **Approach problems** creatively.
3. **Think in terms** of systems.

The three Value Skills are the ability to:

1. **Collaborate** effectively.
2. **Solve** problems.
3. **Make** good decisions.

Value Workers add value to the organization because they're able to:

**See their derailers** and learn new ways to handle them.

**Ask good questions** to identify the viability of their ideas and the ideas of others.

**Think systematically about change**, and seek to establish a shared vision.

**Be mindful** about their actions and outcomes.

**Draw connections** from seemingly disparate sources of information.

**Maintain a big-picture mindset**, and avoid jumping from one problem to another.

**Pay attention to patterns and behaviors** that help them form a framework for understanding problems.

**Suspend judgment** long enough to hear other perspectives.

These skills highlight the need to move from simply training people *what to do* (which helps them function effectively only in known scenarios) to teaching them *how to think*. Here are some ways to do so:

**Teach people** (perhaps through workshops, articles, or e-learning) such things as planning, delegating, negotiating, motivating others, resolving conflict, implementing change, driving results, and creating engagement.

**Show them** how to observe the underlying systems in the organization.

**Train them to ask questions** such as:

- **Why** is this happening?
- **What** can we do to change the patterns we're observing?
- **How** could a new condition influence the pattern?

**Put small things into larger contexts** whenever possible.

**Engage in more dialogue**, less lecturing.

**Let them discover it** instead of telling it. 

## Careful Wording Can Boost Donations by Over 300%

A study reported in *Marketing Science* (pubsonline.informs.org/journal/mksc) shows that small changes in the wording of a fundraising letter can increase donations enormously.


Varying a letter to a cold list of potential donors yielded the following results:

**Donations went up by 110% if the target** was a named individual versus an unnamed group.

**Donations rose 33% if the letter** described how the individual fell into poverty versus being poor with an undescribed past.

**Donations increased 66% if the annual donation** was framed as monthly versus daily amounts.

Combining all these tactics led to a 300% increase in donations.

For past donors from the warm list, the percentage increase in donations was smaller, but the incremental dollar amounts raised were equally impressive. 

## Young People Can Be Advocates, Too

Minor children are a part of the community and have as much right as older folks to advocate for social justice, as Felton Earls and Mary Carlson note in *Voice, Choice, and Action: The Potential of Young Citizens to Heal Democracy* (Harvard University Press, hup.harvard.edu).


Think of the students from Parkland High School, who spoke up against gun violence, and Greta Thunberg, who became actively engaged in protecting the planet. Most communities have young people like these who are active in local affairs. They could be organizing stream cleanups, making statements through children's theaters or art, or contributing in other ways to benefit themselves and adults alike.

Young people have long sought to express themselves and coordinate action. When not given the opportunity to participate productively, they often form gangs that undermine citizenship or they grow into antisocial conspiracy theorists. Intentionally including the voices of children leads to more socially acceptable choices and actions that benefit entire communities.

 Engage in more dialogue, less lecturing. 

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“Many organizations fail to partner with this age group to full advantage.”

It simply makes sense to empower children to participate in their communities because it helps them learn how to respond to civic concerns they will face as adults. This idea is rife with opportunities for nonprofit organizations to lead the way to including children in civic processes. Together, nonprofits and citizen youth can help regenerate society from the community up. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

*Editor's Note:* Also see “Maintaining a Teenage Volunteer Network,” available at [NonprofitWorld.org](http://NonprofitWorld.org) (Vol. 36, No. 1), in which teenager Josh Seides notes that, of all age groups under 35, those aged 16 through 19 are the most likely to volunteer. He argues that many organizations fail to partner with this age group to full advantage and offers suggestions to assure that your organization doesn't miss this crucial opportunity.

## Make Every Conversation Count

Each time you talk to a colleague, you can solidify common beliefs, move your ideas forward, and create positive connections. Even when you must discuss touchy topics – or speak with someone with very different views – there are ways to find common ground. *Breaking through Gridlock* ([bkconnection.com](http://bkconnection.com)) provides steps to transformative conversation. Here's an example of the powerful insights you'll find in this book:

Think of a conversation that didn't go the way you wished it had. Then ask yourself questions such as these:

**What hidden baggage** did you bring to the conversation?


**Were you judgmental, defensive, or impatient** in your reactions (thus closing down any chance of a meeting of minds)?

**Did you reframe the issue** in a way that made you “right” and the other person “wrong”?

**What values** are most important to you? What values do you think the other person has? (Consider those values in a positive way, and note which you agree with and which are compatible with yours.)

**What's the cost** of failing to achieve the results you wanted in the conversation?

**How can you improve this and other conversations** so the results will lead to the future you want?

Ask these questions not only in the workplace but in dialogues with people whose political views are the opposite of yours. Doing so is a step on the way to a whole different world. 

## Use Storytelling to Help New Hires

What if you could help new employees understand your organization's culture and become part of the team in three minutes? You can do just that with a storytelling video, according to Ted Frank, author of *Get to the Heart* (backstories.tv). How to create a great video? The book provides some useful pointers:


**Show (don't tell) new hires** what your organization is all about, using the two rails of emotion and logic. Use quotes from execs combined with compelling visuals.

**Use the pan-and-reveal technique:** Start with a long-distance shot, then zoom in for a close-up of something enthralling, like the expression on a person's face.

**Build tension** and then release it. The key is to keep your audience in suspense and draw them in, holding the tension as long as they can stand it but not so long that they grow tired. Then hit them with a payoff that's worth the wait.

**Introduce your viewers** to heroes – people they can relate to, root for, and want to help. You can do this, for example, with profiles of your clients, employees, strategic partners, or the leaders who built your organization. When people see your organization through the lens of a hero's journey, they're inspired to become part of the story and create innovative ideas to help your heroes.

**Use music:** It's the best way to drop the viewer straight into the world of your story, rivet attention, create drama, and draw people together.

**Through your story, show new hires the payoff of being successful**, both for them and for your organization. Give them confidence that they'll be given autonomy, that their views will be valued, and that they'll make a real difference. 

## Beyond the Briefs

To explore issues raised in these briefs in more detail, take a look at these articles ([NonprofitWorld.org](http://NonprofitWorld.org)):

**How to Fix Communication Breakdowns** (Vol. 29, No. 1)

**A Better Brand = More Loyal Supporters** (Vol. 38, No. 4)

**Unleash the True Power of Conversation** (Vol. 37, No. 2)

**The Best Way to Tell Your Organization's Story? Capture It on Video** (Vol. 35, No. 4)

**To Make an Impact, Improve Your Non-Verbal Skills** (Vol. 38, No. 3)

**The Perils of Problem-Solving – & How to Dodge Them** (Vol. 40, No. 1)

**Can We Call a Truce? Tips for Negotiating Workplace Conflicts** (Vol. 27, No. 6)

**Be a Better Leader by Being a Careful Listener** (Vol. 37, No. 1)

**How to Coach People through Stress: Use Reflective Inquiry for Best Results** (Vol. 38, No. 4)


**Why Your Employees Are Losing Motivation – and What to Do about It** (Vol. 29, No. 4)

**Better Delegation = Better Leadership** (Vol. 37, No. 3)

## Report Shows Decline after Two Years of Record Generosity

U.S. charitable giving declined last year to \$499.33 billion after two years of record contributions, according to a *Giving USA* report (givingusa.org). This decline is a rare occurrence: The only other times it's happened in the past 40 years in current dollars were in 1987, 2008, and 2009.

The decrease can be explained by economic uncertainty and stock market volatility after giving surpassed a half-trillion-dollar milestone during the pandemic era. "Drops in the stock market and high inflation caused many households to make tough decisions about their charitable giving for the year," says Josh Birkholz, Chair of Giving USA Foundation. "But despite uncertain economic times, Americans demonstrated how essential they view the nonprofit sector and its ability to solve big problems – by still giving nearly half a trillion dollars in 2022."

Individual giving as a share of total giving has been declining for several years. It dropped to 70% of total giving in 2018 and has steadily decreased since then, falling further in 2022 to 64%. For the second year in a row, very large gifts by some of the wealthiest Americans represented nearly 5% of individual giving. Mega-giving from six individuals and couples totaled \$13.96 billion. 

### 2022 Charitable Giving by Source:

Source	Up/down	Amount	Adjusted for Inflation
Total	↓ 3.4%	\$499.33 billion	↓ 10.5%
Individuals	↓ 6.4%	\$319.04 billion	↓ 13.4%
Foundations	↑ 2.5%	\$105.21 billion	↓ 5.0%
Bequests	↑ 6.4%	\$319.04 billion	↓ 13.4%
Foundations	↑ 2.5%	\$105.21 billion	↓ 5.0%
Bequests	↑ 2.3%	\$45.60 billion	↓ 5.3%
Corporations	↑ 3.4%	\$29.48 billion	↓ 4.2%

### 2022 Charitable Giving to Recipients:

Type of recipient organization	Up/down	Amount	Adjusted for Inflation
Religion	↑ 5.2%	\$143.57 billion	↓ 2.6%
Education	↓ 3.6%	\$70.07 billion	↓ 10.7%
Human Services	Flat at -0.6%	\$71.98 billion	↓ 8.0%
To Foundations	↑ 10.1%	\$56.84 billion	↑ 1.9%
Public-Society Benefit	↓ 8.4%	\$46.86 billion	↓ 15.2%
Health	↑ 5.1%	\$51.08 billion	↓ 2.6%
International affairs	↑ 10.9%	\$33.71 billion	↑ 2.7%
Arts, culture, & humanities	↑ 2.9%	\$24.67 billion	↓ 4.7%
Environment & animals	↓ 1.6%	\$16.10 billion	↓ 8.9%

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