

Why Aren't You Receiving More Donations?


It's surprising, considering the affluence in the United States and the increase in people's disposable income, that nonprofits aren't raising more money than they are, notes Kenneth Phillips in *Trust, Impact, and Fundraising for Nonprofits* (routledge.com). In fact, the reality seems to be going in the opposite direction. Here are a few of the reasons he points to, along with ways to correct them (see "Beyond the Briefs" on page 29 for articles with more details on this advice):

Nonprofits don't do a good job of measuring, verifying, and communicating their results. You need to show donors how their contributions are being used and provide them with evaluation results. Give them clear-cut numbers that show the value they're receiving in return for what they give. Be careful not to focus on money in your communications. Instead, learn all you can about supporters and prospects so that you can build close, authentic relationships with them. Make your communications all about *them*, not about how great your organization is.

Scandals occur too often in the nonprofit world. There should be more processes in place to prevent such behavior. Also, nonprofits need to advocate more strongly. They must respond quickly when scandals occur, since every wrongdoing tarnishes the reputation of the entire sector.

There isn't enough emphasis on mentoring and learning. It's vital to develop a culture of learning throughout your organization. Include education and learning as a priority in all planning. Set up formal and informal mentoring programs for everyone in your organization. In your strategic plan, give attention to creating an environment for all staff to embrace learning as a personal priority. Promote periodic self-assessment in meetings, mentoring conversations, and group discussions as well as in annual reviews. Confirm that everyone is expected to contribute to learning and improvement.

Failures are too often covered over and treated as shameful episodes when, in reality, they're an important part of changing and growing. To build a healthy organization, make it commonplace to accept mistakes and failings as opportunities to improve. Share your own shortcomings and weaknesses openly, and encourage others to do the same. Use them as teaching moments.

Trust is what allows the nonprofit sector to exist, Phillips makes clear. For people to give their support, an organization must be trusted for its behavior and respected for its results, he explains. To be credible, behavior and results must be measured, verified, and communicated. Demonstrating good behavior, getting good results, and being accountable to stakeholders are the three critical issues you must master in order to increase your fundraising success. The practices he describes in his book will help nonprofits build their reputations and increase revenue. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

“Every wrongdoing tarnishes the entire sector.”

“Frame it so people feel they have a choice.”

Call for Help

If you're like most people, you find it hard to ask for help. But doing so has benefits not only for you but for the person you ask. In *Reinforcements: How to Get People to Help You* (Harvard Business Review Press, hbr.org), Heidi Grant offers some insights about appealing for help:


Being helpful makes people feel good – but only if they don't feel *compelled* to help. Frame your request so that they feel they have a choice. If they can't help in the way you want, be sure to give them other ways to lend a hand.

Emphasize things that reinforce helpful behavior: a sense of being part of a shared purpose, a positive sense of identity, and the impact the person's support will have.

Use the word “together.” It's a powerful social cue to the brain, serving as a kind of “relatedness reward,” signaling that your helper is connected to trustworthy people working toward the same goal.

Talk about shared experiences and feelings. A sense of being on the same team will reinforce people's desire to help you.

Be generous with gratitude. Praise your helpers for being wonderful, generous people. Assure them you'll appreciate and welcome anything they can do to help. Follow up to let them know the impact they made with their helpful deeds.

Know your audience, and emphasize what matters to them, not to you. For example, Grant explains how many nonprofits make the mistake of appealing only to liberals by using words such as *injustice*, *harm*, or *cure*. To draw in conservative donors, try concepts like *purity*, *sanctity*, *respect for authority*, and *patriotism*. Reinforce for your potential helpers the positive view they have of themselves. That's the reward that will motivate them to give, and give again. 

Emotions Are Your Key to Great Leadership

The essence of leadership is helping people aspire to create positive change, according to Reiner Lomb, leadership coach and CEO of Boomerang Coach (reiner.lomb@boomerangcoach.com). In *Aspire* (routledge.com), he offers seven essential emotions you need to manage in order to lead transformation in your organization:

Empathy: The Gate to Caring

“To be a leader, you must care,” Lomb says. Empathy – being in resonance with someone else's emotions – opens a gateway to caring.

Compassion: The Commitment to Serving

Caring by itself is not enough, as Lomb makes clear. In addition to empathy, you need to feel compassion – a deep commitment to serve others – in order to spur action.

Interest: The Key to Understanding

Great leaders want to know what drives people's behavior so they can serve them as effectively as possible. They are

genuinely interested in others and want to understand their needs and challenges.

Optimism: The Lens for Visioning

An optimistic view helps you envision a new future for your stakeholders. Your vision then provides a common purpose that pulls everyone forward.


Inspiration: The Energy for Mobilizing

To make your vision a reality, you need to mobilize people. The ability to inspire others to act is “the most powerful leadership competency that distinguishes extraordinary leaders,” Lomb submits.

Trust: The Fuel for Collaborating

Once you’ve mobilized people, you need to coordinate their efforts. Trust is the emotion that enables collaboration. High-trust organizations perform better and have healthier, happier, and more engaged employees.

Positivity: The Ability to Face Setbacks with Resilience

Positivity consists of the previous six emotions plus others, such as aspiration, awe, gratitude, hope, and joy. Positive emotions build resilience, while negative ones destroy our ability to bounce back in the face of hardship. “Whether we spread negativity or positivity is a choice,” Lomb says. 

How to Get Smart about Legacy Giving – Fast



My alma mater keeps sending me this fancy, nice-looking newsletter that’s all about “planned giving.” They’re hoping I’ll include them in my will. So far, so good. That’s a smart strategy for any fundraiser.

But the bulk of the newsletter is about other planned giving products. Like charitable gift annuities, remainder unitrusts, donations of appreciated securities . . . and on and on. I’m sure those things are all good ways to support my dear old alma mater. But they’re not for me. They’re hardly for anyone. They make sense for some high

net worth people who live with a lot of financial complexity, usually managed by accountants. They don’t mean much to the rest of us.

So that nice newsletter is mainly about financial products that I won’t (or can’t) use. That’s too bad, because I might choose to include them in my will. I don’t have to be a Mr. Moneybags to do that. Almost anyone can do it.


But my alma mater is paralyzing my decision-making. Too much choice leads to no decision.

That’s one of the foundational truths you’ll learn in *How to Talk about Legacy Giving* (hilborn-civilsectorpress.com). This excellent book is a treasure-trove of must-know things about encouraging donors to include your organization in their wills. Whether you’re a beginner or an old hand, you’ll be more

equipped for this extremely important area of fundraising when you read this book.

It’s a quick, easy read. You don’t need to be a financial planner or attorney to get what you need.

This is an ultra-important topic for all fundraisers, because the potential reward is astounding. You can easily double long-term donor revenue. Or triple it. Or more.

But you need to be on top of it. Now. 


—reviewed by Jeff Brooks

Taking Action for the Common Good

You may not consider your organization an “interest group.” But you probably do want to see a particular interest furthered through government policy-making.

Likewise, you may do little, if any, “lobbying.” But you’re likely impacted by public policies, and those policies are a result of lobbying.

For these reasons, *Interest Groups and Lobbying* (routledge.com) is worth reading. The author, Thomas T. Holyoke, doesn’t confine his definition of lobbying to the IRS code’s narrow definition. His definition is more akin to advocacy – asking others to take action on an issue. He provides a useful explanation of how nonprofits can gain influence and champion the rights of their constituents.

Holyoke argues that those with a distaste for lobbying don’t understand how important interest-group representation is. This book presents a reasoned explanation about the need for and use of lobbying. Nonprofit organization leaders who read it will have a better grasp of how it works and why their organizations ought to participate. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Caution: Online Dangers Ahead

Tis the season for joy and goodwill – and a surge of cyber threats, fraud, and a host of malicious practices that explode during the holidays. For example, during peak shopping periods, cybercriminals exploit people’s networks to gain unauthorized entry to their systems and leave organizations open to identity theft and the hijacking of people’s credit cards, credentials, and other data. As you seek end-of-year donations, it’s vital to amp up your cybersecurity and assure donors that your systems are trustworthy and unassailable during this precarious time.

As Steve Santamaria, CEO of Folio Photonics (foliophotonics.com) notes, the holiday season “ushers in a surge of cyber threats, ranging from phishing attacks to ransomware campaigns.” Some ways to face these challenges include:

robust encryption to boost security protocols

comprehensive audit trails to meet stringent compliance requirements

automated data retention policies to simplify data management

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scalability to ensure uninterrupted operations during peak holiday traffic

e-mail authentication standards to improve e-mail security and prevent phishing

sustainability practices that align with environmental goals

unwavering regulatory compliance, which remains the linchpin of data integrity.

Don Boxley, co-founder of DH2i (dh2i.com) advises nonprofits to deploy software-defined perimeter (SDP) technology to mitigate these risks. This technology “ensures that trust is not assumed for any user or device” and “rigorously verifies user identities and security postures.” In addition, it “offers application-level access policies, network segmentation, and real-time monitoring, enhancing cybersecurity defenses” and safeguarding your operations during this busy season.

By embracing these solutions, you’ll not only protect data but also preserve people’s trust in your organization. 

Create Lightbulb Moments in Your Conversations

You can’t simply tell people to change, much as you might wish you could. “Unless someone begs you for direction and suggestions, you are wasting time dispensing wisdom,” Marcia Reynolds points out in her inspirational, actionable guide, *Breakthrough Coaching* (bkconnection.com). Instead, you need to use a coaching approach.

The insights Reynolds gives the reader are many. Here are just a few:

Begin by seeking the other person’s perspective. Show people you’re truly listening by summarizing what they’ve said using their words, not your interpretation of their meaning. Ask questions to be sure you understand.

“Understand the nine different types of silence.”


Help people come up with a clear vision of what they want.

Be sure they have a desired outcome to hold on to as you move through your coaching conversations. You may need to peel away layers of their story so they can clearly see their desired outcome instead of the problems and worries that stand in their way.

Accept people’s emotions as normal human reactions. Release judgment, and help them process the feelings that surface. “Remain calm and silently hold a safe, caring space until the emotional reaction subsides,” Reynolds counsels.

Recognize that there are many kinds of silence. It’s important to pause and be still now and then to free up a space for insightful thought, and you must “consciously choose how you are holding your stillness,” Reynolds explains. She describes nine types of silence, from “dumb silence or apathy” to “alive, harmonious, and appreciative silence” that creates safety and connection. Open your mind and body to the silence of peaceful accord, Reynolds urges. “People will relax into the

container you hold,” she suggests, so that you can shepherd them into “a new awareness filled with possibility.”

Be curious about what people want for the future. Ask, “Who do you want to be to make your desires a reality?” Follow up by asking, “Can you begin being this person now?” 

Good Questions about Creativity

As the authors of *Explaining Creativity*, R. Keith Sawyer and Danah Henriksen, explain, there has been an explosion of exciting research in the area of human innovation. Their comprehensive and immensely helpful book, published by Oxford University Press (corp.oup.com) brings together this research to provide an overview of what scientists have learned about creativity.

The authors accompany each chapter with a list of “thought experiments” – intriguing questions for you to ponder. Here’s a brief sampling:

Does your organization encourage innovation? Does it support change? How does it do so?


How often do you engage in brainstorming with others to come up with a new idea or to solve a problem? How effective is this process? What contributes to its success?

What unique elements make you who you are? Is creativity a part of that?

Have you ever had an idea that, when you evaluate it, isn’t workable? What evaluative process made that clear? Why didn’t you see it right away?

Can you think of a moment of insight that occurred recently and, if so, what triggered it?

Do you ever combine two things that usually don’t go together to create a brand new idea? How well does this new idea work?

Do you feel more creative at certain times of the day? How do you take advantage of that time? 



Improve Communication by Understanding People’s Biases

People are more distracted than ever before. How can you capture their attention in the face of so much noise and confusion?


You can turn your interactions to your advantage, Gabe Zichermann says in *The A-Ha Method* (rowman.com) by inserting eye-opening moments at various times during your communications and by understanding your audience’s point of view, including their cognitive biases. Here are a few of the most important biases when it comes to communication:

Anchoring bias occurs when people rely too heavily on the first piece of information they receive about a subject. *How to*

use it: Place your strongest argument as soon as possible in a presentation.

The availability cascade is best summed up by the adage, “Repeat something enough times and it becomes true.” *How to use it:* Repeat your central idea many times. To maximize the effect, use *precisely* the same phrase every time.

Parkinson’s law of triviality refers to people’s tendency to focus on unimportant issues rather than doing hard work and making tough decisions. *How to use it:* Turn what’s hard into a series of smaller, easier, more fun tasks that build toward the final goal. Explain why the hard stuff is important and why it must be tackled, not avoided.


Since you can’t eliminate people’s biases, you need to learn to use them to good effect. Doing so is one of the most powerful ways to improve your communication. 

Reducing the Risks of Giving

All donors face uncertainty about the effectiveness of their gifts. Their donations may not reach intended beneficiaries, and the money may not do the good expected. Reducing the risk of giving has become an industry in itself. Some common ways to reduce risk include having donors create and manage projects, focusing on pre-determined results, and stressing financial accountability.

Smart Risks (practicalactionpublishing.com) explores reducing risk in an all too infrequent way – through small manageable grants with beneficiary participation. When this approach is used, communities frequently improve their lot because community members are accountable to each other.

Small donations and grants won’t resolve sweeping issues like refugee crises, poverty, homelessness, human-caused climate change, or a growing sex trafficking problem. Yet an increasing number of skilled intermediaries are helping donors reduce contribution risk by including people on the ground to deal with problems that need the addition of one more tool. Participatory decision-making and a small influx of cash are the hand up – that one small tool – that disenfranchised communities may need to take ownership of change. Small grants help keep projects from being defined by money, and communities from becoming dependent on it.

Some of the projects described in this book didn’t work at first, but by letting communities resolve problems themselves, even these projects ended up achieving far greater results than expected. The authors provide many rich examples of how relying on local expertise, looking at accountability differently, and letting go of control were effective. Along with these examples, the book presents valuable discussions of what smart risks in grassroots grantmaking are, and who most benefits from them. 

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

“Let communities resolve problems themselves.”

Beyond Burnout

Burnout is on the rise in organizations across the country, as Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter tell us in *The Burnout Challenge* (Harvard University Press, hup.harvard.edu). They define burnout as “an employee experience of a crushing *exhaustion*, feelings of *cynicism and alienation*, and a sense of *ineffectiveness*.” Burnout is “an apt term, suggesting a once-hot fire that has been reduced to ashes.” You can lessen the risk of burnout for those in your organization by sharing the following coping strategies with them and making sure your policies buttress these techniques:

Help people stay healthy. Support good health by offering your employees nutritious snacks rather than junk food in your break room and in food you bring in for meetings and celebrations. Make sure people are taking enough breaks and that there’s water available so they stay hydrated. Encourage exercise with strategies such as having walking meetings, bringing in yoga and fitness instructors, and the like.

Reduce stress, and promote relaxation. Much burnout results from chronic workplace stress. You can lessen people’s tension by being sure they have enough time to finish assignments without feeling rushed, overwhelmed, and inadequate. If possible, have a quiet room or corner where people can go when they need to take time out.

Reinforce self-awareness. Helping people become more conscious of their unique personalities, needs, and motives can enable personal adjustments and coping strategies, the authors say. “People with greater self-awareness are more likely, for example, to modify their job expectations to be more realistic. They might recognize that their strong desire to be appreciated by others is making it hard to say no. They might recognize some negative tendency in their behavior, perhaps being too quick to say things that strike others as inappropriate or hurtful, and therefore learn to pause and count to ten.”

Help them develop new skills. “Becoming more competent in one’s specific job tasks can improve how one responds to work stressors,” Maslach and Leiter point out. “So can building related skills, such as time management and conflict resolution.” Learning to share emotions more productively with colleagues is another useful ability, as are meditation and mindfulness techniques. There are many ways to nurture new approaches, including training sessions, workshops, mentoring, and coaching.


Let them get away from the job. One of the best suggestions for coping with workplace stress is simple: Work less. And there are many ways you can help people do so. For example, encourage them to take more breaks, slow down their pace of work, avoid overtime, take mental-health days off, use all their vacation days, and take sabbaticals.

Boost people’s social connections. Support from colleagues will ease the threat of burnout. Friendly connections are “a much-needed source of humor, optimism, and encouragement when the going gets tough,” say Maslach and Leiter. You can promote social ties by scheduling times for people to get together and to know one another better. Celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, endings, beginnings, and anything else that comes to mind.

Some of these ideas may work better for some people than others, and some may be easier to access, “perhaps because

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“Burnout suggests a once-hot fire, now reduced to ashes.”

they are made available to workers as part of their job benefits; for example, growing numbers of organizations offer yoga classes on-site and provide counseling resources. Other strategies may require more individual initiative to pursue,” Maslach and Leiter explain. Clearly, how well an organization makes an effort to use these strategies will make a big difference in whether burnout becomes a serious problem. 

Decide How to Decide


Work is rapidly changing, and our attitudes and decision-making skills must change as well, as Jeremy White makes clear in his insightful book *Make Better Strategic Decisions* (taylorandfrancis.com). Some take-aways:

In our age of artificial intelligence, the demand for highly skilled workers is increasing. More than ever before, we need people who value knowledge and constant learning.

It's wrong-headed to believe that people act rationally when making decisions. They're driven by biases, short-term pressures, and expediency. We need to understand how heuristics, hubris, and a host of human frailties affect people's behavior.

Self-management – including personal development, active learning, resilience, stress tolerance, and flexibility – is a vital skill for every leader and worker today.

Risk – weighing risks and making risky decisions – is a key part of leading. Leaders must manage the natural desire to take easy options.

Many decisions are paradoxical because we want two opposing outcomes. “We need to move from a mindset of problem solving to problem resolving,” says White, “because we rarely solve strategic problems. We do not fix them.” Instead, we need to “discover how a paradox can be turned into an opportunity.” 

The Political Nature of Your Words

You're probably not conscious of how political your language is. The authors of *The Politics of Language*, David Beaver and Jason Stanley, do a superb job of illuminating the partisan nuances of common words and phrases. The book, published by Princeton University Press (press.princeton.edu), includes insights such as these:


Words are embedded in practices and thus are “vehicles for ideology,” the authors say. There's no such thing as a neutral word, they argue. Political messaging has little to do with logic but instead is based on the way words resonate with people and the way ideas are framed. Such communication depends on emotion, not reason or consistency, for its effectiveness.

Language can distort the “facts” in many ways. The words that are chosen, those that are deliberately left out, and language that's vague or incoherent all have the power to harm. As evidence, consider slurs, which insult through innuendo,

and bureaucratic speech, which harms by “objectifying and masking.”

Some harmful political speech is overt, such as calling blacks “super-predators.” Other such language is covert and hidden. Dog whistling, for instance, is speech that seems transparent but brings up negative reactions by those who have a racial bias. Examples include words like “welfare,” “food stamps,” and “the poor,” which signal the idea that blacks are lazy.

We can connect people as well as divide them with the words we use. Words like “equality” and “freedom” have a strong resonance. They draw on people's feelings to bring them into harmony with their in-group.

These points summarize a small fraction of a complex work. You'll need to take your time with this book and ponder it deeply. Once you're aware of the subtleties of speech described here, you're likely to see political language baked into almost everything you read and hear. 

Why Foundations Don't Support Endowments for Equity

Endowments have typically been provided by wealthy individuals, but some foundations provide support for nonprofits seeking to start (or grow) endowments. Recipients of endowment grants don't tend to be the kinds of community organizations that emphasize equity, so the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) investigated whether that may change. The results are reported in *Funding Nonprofit Endowments: Foundation Perspectives and Practices*, available in the Center for Effective Philanthropy's online resource library (cep.org). The findings are intriguing.

First, few foundations (less than a third) give to build endowments at all. Even fewer help nonprofits start endowments. The amount given for endowments is a tiny fraction of total foundation support. Second, endowment support tends to be granted to larger, stable institutions with a focus on healthcare, education, or the preservation of art and historic relics.

Most foundations contribute to current – not future – needs, and this isn't expected to change. Qualitative research reveals that reacting to needs now, rather than avoiding future crises or providing reparations for historic damage (whether ethnic, socio-economic, or environmental) is the priority of the vast number of foundations. This stance is rooted in the short-term, fix-immediate-problems capitalism of today and is often at odds with the purposes of nonprofits focused on equity.

These findings shouldn't be surprising since foundations are, essentially, financial institutions functioning to support the status quo. The conclusion is that until the large majority of foundations reconsider their roles in society, grassroots and equity organizations can't rely on endowment funds from foundations to support change. Equity simply hasn't been on the radar for support from foundations, and, due to reluctance to change and risk aversion, the situation is likely to continue.



–reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

Beyond the Briefs

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

- Can You Thank Your Donors Too Much?** (Vol. 41, No. 2)
- Boost Your Organization's Resilience** (Vol. 38, No. 3)
- Twelve Heuristics That Will Raise Your IQ** (Vol. 26, No. 4)
- Manage for Today, Mentor for Tomorrow** (Vol. 23, No. 5)
- The Risky Six: Keys to Shed Fear & Take Smart Risks** (Vol. 40, No. 2)
- Are You Using These Drivers of Fundraising Success?** (Vol. 40, No. 3)
- Something Is Missing: The First Step in Evaluation** (Vol. 29, No. 6)
- Making Better Mistakes** (Vol. 38, No. 4)
- Shape a Culture of Trust: The Foundation of Successful Workplace** (Vol. 40, No. 2)
- The Nonprofit Overhead Myth** (Vol. 31, No. 5)
- To Be an Ingenious Leader, Take Charge of Your Learning** (Vol. 37, No. 3)
- The Best Way to Raise Endowment Funds** (Vol. 41, No. 3)
- Are You Breeding the Conditions for Fraud to Occur?** (Vol. 39, No. 3)
- One-on-One Coaching: The Most Effective Way to Develop Your People** (Vol. 41, No. 3)
- Don't Get Caught by Phishing Schemes** (Vol. 35, No. 2)
- How to Make the Best Decisions** (Vol. 42, No. 1)
- A Path to Stronger Programs, Greater Engagement, and Less Burnout?** (Vol. 36, No. 1)
- Serve This, Not That** (Vol. 37, No. 4)
- Nine Surefire Steps to Lock Down Your Cybersecurity** (Vol. 36, No. 3)
- Wire Transfer Fraud: It Could Happen to You** (Vol. 35, No. 3)
- Avoid Internet Dangers: Practice Safe Surfing & Defensive E-Mail** (Vol. 39, No. 3)
- Can You Lobby for a Cause You Believe in?** (Vol. 36, No. 2)
- Ransomware Readiness & Recovery: Do's and Don'ts to Safeguard Your Data** (Vol. 42, No. 4) (see page 4 of this issue).

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