

Pure gold – the 34 fundamental foundations of fundraising

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Pure gold – 34 fabulous fundraising foundations

- 1.** People give to people. Not to organisations, mission statements, or strategies.
- 2.** Fundraising isn't something we do to people, it's something we do with people. Friend-making comes before fundraising. Fundraising is not selling. Fundraisers and donors are on the same side.
- 3.** Fundraising is not about money. It's about necessary work that urgently needs doing. Money is the means to an end, not the end itself.
- 4.** Fundraisers need to be able to see things through their donors' eyes. And to put themselves in their donors' shoes.
- 5.** Fundraisers have to really understand their donors. If they are to understand you, you must first understand them. Fundraisers have to learn to talk to their donors where they are, not where the fundraiser might want them to be.
- 6.** It helps if you are a donor yourself. No one should be a fundraiser without first being a donor.
- 7.** Donor-led, not target-led. Involve donors, listen to donors and give your donors choices. The donor should decide what she or he gets and whether or not she or he gives. Whatever he or she gives, it's OK with the fundraiser.
- 8.** No pressure, ever. To the question how much pressure to give is acceptable the only possible answer is, none. No pressure should ever be applied to persuade a donor to make a gift he or she would not give freely, otherwise.
- 9.** First open their hearts, then their minds. Then they will open their wallets. All three are important, in that order.
- 10.** Fundraising is about needs as well as achievements. People applaud achievement, but will give to meet a need.
- 11.** Harness the simple power of emotion. Fundraisers need to learn how to do this in their stories and solutions. Fundraising has to appeal first to the emotions. Logic can then reinforce the appeal, but be aware that emotion is many times more powerful.

12. Don't just ask people to give. Inspire them to give. Fundraising is the inspiration business.

13. Offer a clear, direct proposition people can relate to. For example, 'make a blind man see. £20.00'.

14. Prompt, appropriate feedback is essential to reassure the donor and show the difference his or her gift has made. Fundraisers should practice the five Fs – to be famous for fast, frequent, fabulous feedback.

15. Share your problems as well as your successes with your donors. Honesty and openness are usually prized more highly than expert opinion and apparent infallibility.

16. Bring the need close to the donor. To help this idea stick I was taught the adage 'One needy old person next door equals 10 needy old people in Manchester equals 100 needy old people in Maharashtra.' (Of course I was living in London at the time. If you live in India, then it would be the other way round).

17. You don't get if you don't ask – usually. Know whom to ask, how much to ask for, when and how. Sometimes though your ask can be so subtle as to be almost unnoticeable, or better still, in the light of every charity's implicit need for funds you can simply stand back and let the donor's natural enthusiasm supply 'the ask'.

18. 'Brand' is a lot less important to donors than it is to you. So don't obsess about brand with its perceived high cost and rigid rules, but rather aspire to present your organisation's image, beliefs, values, character and distinctiveness clearly, simply and consistently (which is the essence of what a charity's brand should be). It'll pay if your donors can readily distinguish your cause from all the others, without feeling you are a slave to brand guidelines.

The point here is that our publics have made it very clear that they don't like charities adopting the clothes of big business, so fundraisers should take care to present their own distinctive version of brand.

19. Successful fundraising depends on transformational storytelling. Fundraisers have the best stories in the world to tell and the best reasons for telling them with pace and passion that will inspire action. Stories should focus more on the why than on the how and the what.

20. Information is giving out, communication is getting through. Fundraising is all about the communication of inspiration. Fundraisers do this best by telling moving, authentic stories: the truth told well. Storytelling is the best way to get your emotional message – your WHY? – not just out, but through. So start a story bank, to collect, preserve and share your best stories.

- 21.** Great fundraising is sharing. Share your goals and encourage real involvement. When donors become truly involved in your campaign great things happen. Share your problems too, as well as your successes.
- 22.** Always try to turn complaints into support. The most loyal donor is the donor who has complained and has then been satisfactorily responded to.
- 23.** Trust appears to increase in importance as people get older. The trustworthiness of a fundraiser and his/her organisation is a reason both to start and to continue support.
- 24.** For great results, make your donors feel great. If your results are mediocre, your fundraising probably is too, which may be because your donors aren't seeing it as they should. Great fundraising requires imagination. Too much fundraising looks like everything else.
- 25.** Always be honest, open and truthful with your donors. Donors will not forgive you if you are less than straight with them.
- 26.** Avoid waste. Donors hate waste.
- 27.** Technique must never be allowed to obscure sincerity. As all actors know, you can't fake sincerity.
- 28.** Fundraisers and donors have a relationship of shared conviction. This is much more important than their shared commercial interest.
- 29.** Great fundraising means being '15 minutes ahead'. There are few opportunities now to be light years ahead of all the other competing causes, but many ways you can be just a little bit ahead. To keep the advantage you have to learn to spot opportunities and take prudent risks boldly.
- 30.** Always say 'thank you', properly and often. And accurately (few things are less forgivable than thanking a donor for something he or she hasn't done). It's also a good idea to be brilliant at saying 'welcome!'.
- 31.** Fundraisers should learn the lessons of history and experience. Anyone who would be an effective fundraiser needs first to do some homework. A lot of homework, to be honest, for fundraisers really need to know their stuff. Ignorant amateurs are more likely to be all kinds of problem than any kind of solution.
- 32.** Focus on the donor experience. Fundraisers need to be able to define, quantify and measure the donor experience, so they can ensure it's always great.

33. Invest time and money sufficiently, boldly and wisely. If it's to succeed fundraising requires the twin investments of time and money. Far more fundraising fails because not enough is spent on it, rather than too much.

34. Fundraising cannot ever be separated from the cause – the great big WHY? Those who spend donors' money must be as entirely involved in donors and their experience as those who raise money from donors.

The list could go on. Great fundraising also involves care, respect, sensitivity, empathy, being appropriate, engaging people, using technology creatively, patience and, of course, being modest and unassuming.

While the list is universal it's almost certainly not comprehensive and may exclude some important principles that relate particularly to your organisation. Whatever your principles it's wise to capture them: write them down, communicate them to colleagues, trustees, donors and suppliers. And when you prepare a fundraising communications plan, or any kind of strategy for donors, check how it measures up to your principles of fundraising and your understanding of its essential foundations.