

THE ART

OF

A STRONG

FUNDRAISING

MESSAGE

The Art of a Strong Fundraising Message



The CauseMatch coaches and creative team have helped nonprofits raise hundreds of millions of dollars from crowdfunding campaigns. This course will be your insider's look at how we craft the messaging to inspire as many donations as possible.

You are on your way to understanding the STEP BY STEP process that the CauseMatch creative team goes through to inspire donors all over the world!

The five lessons we will cover are:

Lesson #1 What Do You Do? Understanding Your Own "Ask"

Lesson #2 Adding the Most Important Ingredient To Your Fundraising Message

Lesson #3 Stickiness. The Key To All Good Messaging

Lesson #4 Putting It All Together

Lesson #5 Emotion. Repetition. BOY.

If you follow these steps, you WILL raise more money than you otherwise would. After all, a core tenet of our philosophy is to listen to data. Everything we profess is based on our research and numbers.

Simply put: this method works.

In order to keep you on task, we'll assign "homework" for you to do.

If you truly want to learn how to craft the best fundraising message possible, it's crucial that you work through the steps that will lead to success.

This is the exact framework we use at CauseMatch with proven success.

Lastly, we're receptive to your feedback! **Please email us** throughout the process.

We'll respond to every email you send us!

Without further ado... let's jump in.



Lesson #1

What Do You Do? Understanding Your Own “Ask”

Your organization provides a service. Maybe you save endangered whales. Maybe you give homeless people coats in the winter. Maybe you run a synagogue or community center. If you're like most service providers, you love talking about the change that your organization enables.

“We have saved SO MANY whales,” you may say at a dinner party when asked what your organization's mission is.

And when you sit down with a donor to make your ask... Or as you begin to craft your next pitch... you may be tempted to open with a grandiose report about how successful your organization has been.

You think to yourself, “Everyone likes to be a part of a winning team. Donors want to know



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that we're worthy of their donations. They want to see what our impact has been over the last year or two or three.”

As counter-intuitive as it might seem, do not start your message this way. In fact, delete it from all parts of your pitch.

Do not talk about how great your organization is.

Reread that previous sentence. Read it again. And again.

The problem with talking about how great your organization is that you are not giving the donor a problem to solve. You're not allowing the donor to play the part of the hero in their story. If you tell them you've already saved 2,000 whales without their help, why should they invest in your org? You seem to be pretty darn successful with your current resources. What donors should receive in return for their gift is a strong feeling of elation. They should be proud to give to your organization. In order to convey to them how much donors are needed, you must lay the groundwork from your opening words.

To internalize Lesson #1, you have to get inside the minds of your donors. How are you going to convey to them that their donation is going to have an AMAZING impact on your cause? What are you going to give them in return for their hard-earned money?

It all starts with one simple objective:

Your pitch should GIVE THE DONOR A PROBLEM TO SOLVE.

“The whales are in danger. Unless something changes, the harm will be irreparable.”



Every conversation you have with a donor can be centered on his/her passion for your cause. Every sentence you write in your next direct mail solicitation, pitch, or Facebook message should contribute toward making the donor feel like they are the solution to the problem.

If you do this, all of your other messaging will come into place.

A “good” articulation of the problem you are trying to solve will have these qualities:

It will contain no jargony words...only words that regular people use in daily speech. We respond better when we are addressed plainly.

It will not mention your organization... your organization is part of the solution, NOT the

problem, so there is no need to bring it up now.

You’ll have more than enough time later on in the process to reel them in.

It will be specific... paint a vivid picture of the pain that a single recipient feels before your organization gets involved.

“
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After reading Lesson #1

your assignment for today is....

- > Spend 10 minutes thinking about the problem your organization is trying to solve using the guidelines above.
- > Fill in your answers in the Lesson 1 worksheet.

<https://did.li/fiRfT>





Lesson #2

Adding the Most Important Ingredient to Your Fundraising Message

When I first started fundraising, I was tasked to create messaging for a small-but-growing synagogue. My first two attempts at crafting communication tools failed miserably. Worse yet, I couldn't figure out why.

I hit all the key points: the programming was strong; the rabbi was charismatic; the congregation stood for social values, etc. But donors simply weren't reacting as



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generously as we had hoped.

One of the synagogue's board members approached me to share her experience as a congregant.

"We are a family," she said. "This building is our community. It's where we go when there's a birth or a death. It's where we want to be both in times of joy and times of sadness."

And then she said this. "Without this synagogue, I wouldn't have a support system, spiritually or socially."

Not only did she identify the problem that the synagogue addresses, she added the "why" as well.

The problem? People are looking for spiritual and social fulfillment.

Why is that important? Because their lives would be lacking otherwise.

I changed the fundraising message immediately and began to watch donations start rolling in.

Years later, the synagogue still uses the same core messaging in their materials today.

In the previous lesson, I asked you to identify the problem that your organization tackles and address why it's important.

Identifying the problem is a crucial step in creating a compelling case for giving because it allows donors to understand the value of their gifts.

If you haven't yet written down WHAT the problem is and WHY you're addressing it, please do so now.



The Most Important Ingredient

Now that you're super clear on the problem....

The whales are endangered and could go extinct.

The homeless are shivering in the cold, which makes them susceptible to illness.

People are searching for spiritual fulfillment.

The racial divide is growing.

The question is how you can raise as much money as possible to solve the problem.

How can you convey the importance of the problem in a way that inspires a large donation?

The answer is to use the word "YOU".



When you transition from the problem to the solution, you may be tempted (again) to talk about your organization's amazing accomplishments. Resist the urge.

Remember: Donors don't give TO your organization. Donors give THROUGH your organization.

You, the executive director, MUST put the donor at the center of the message. You do this by using and re-using the word you."

YOU=DONOR. YOU=HERO. DONOR=HERO

It's the difference between "Coats For The Homeless takes care of those in need" and "By giving, YOU take care of those in need." By coupling a "problem to solve" with language that focuses on "you," you have established the classic storytelling arc.

Someone has been tied down to the train tracks.

But fear not! Superman is on his way. In order to provide that feeling of elation, you must allow donors to experience heroism.

As I've shared this approach - to describe the problem and then paint the donor as the hero - with clients and colleagues, I am often met with the objections below. But when it comes to fundraising, our gut feelings are not nearly as reliable as proven results.



Objection #1:

I can't talk about the donor the whole time. If I don't talk about my organization, donors won't trust us.

Trust is important. And it must be established. But it is not your primary objective when making a solicitation. Your primary objective is making donors feel like they have changed the lives of the people (or animals) that your organization serves.

Later on, we'll discuss psychological tips and tricks that enable you to convey your trustworthiness subtly, without removing the spotlight from the donor. For now, your job is to focus on the donor.

Unless you are dealing with someone who has specific trust issues with your organization, you will see a better return on investment by focusing on the bond between the donor and your service recipients.



Objection #2:

Will spending time talking about the problem imply that my organization isn't successful?

Your organization uses your donor's donations to solve a problem. So if you want to raise more money from someone, spend time talking about how big of an impact a 10% increase would go. Spend time talking about how much more of the solution you could provide if you had a boost from the donor.

Describe a picture of the world now and what it could look like if the donor decides to help.



Objection #3:

We want to educate our donors and raise awareness for our cause.

Fundraisers (and boards especially) love to talk about donor education. But allow me tell you something. Donor education is a HUGE mistake. Study after study proves that donors give with their hearts, not with their heads. It's why statistics do not work in fundraising. Our task as fundraisers is emotional, not educational. Awareness does not lead to education. And education does not lead to increased giving.

It's all about making the donor FEEL, not think.



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Ignore the objections in your head and do this instead. Take all of your institutional knowledge and distill it down for a donor who isn't "in it" like you are. Use clear, vivid words that explain to donors that they can have a tremendous impact by donating.

“**A** homeless man lies down in his bed underneath a bridge trying to fall asleep. His teeth are chattering. But you can help him. Your donation means that he gets a coat. It means that you have kept him warm. It means that you have given him the blessing of a good night's sleep.”

It's your elevator pitch but altered to focus on the donor. By addressing how the donor can solve the problem, you take the next major step in implementing a donor-centered approach designed for optimized fundraising results.





After reading Lesson #2

Your action items for today are....

Action Item #1: Go to your organization's website, read your mission statement, and memorize it to the best of your abilities.

Action Item #2: Complete the Lesson #2 Worksheet here:
<https://did.li/NELw5>



Example:

Robert is on the road to nowhere. Fifteen-years-old and already two arrests.

The judge told him he would try Robert as an adult the next time around. If no one steps up to help, Robert seems destined to spend serious time in jail. If only Green Oaks After School operated in Robert's district. Then, he would have a place to go after class. That's where you come in.

The example above demonstrates an especially effective method: the story is not yet complete. It is told in present tense and the service recipient's status in a current state of flux. That lays the groundwork for the donor to swoop in and play the hero.



Lesson #3

Best Practices of a Good Story

1. **Stories should be about ONE person.** You want to create an emotional connection between the donor and the subject. In the short amount of time that you have the donor's attention, do your best to paint a vivid picture of the situation. Use specific examples and really introduce the "character" in your story to your donors. If they feel emotionally invested, they will follow with a financial investment.

2. **Statistics don't work.** Stories about individuals do. People think in stories, and the more vivid the imagery, the more memorable it is. A story about a single individual in the frigid cold is more memorable than statistics about the number of homeless people around us. Not only is it more memorable, but it is more inspirational, too.

Donors are more likely to get involved after hearing about one person (or a small group of people) than hearing numbers about the magnitude of the problem.

3. **Keep it simple.** My style is to write stories as succinctly as possible. While I know that longer stories can work, the practice of writing short stories ensures that my stories remain SIMPLE.

I try not to introduce any other characters in the story beside the main one. And when I do add more supporting cast, I keep details to a minimum.

The challenge of writing a good story is balancing simplicity and imagery. You want to paint a clear picture for donors without losing their attention. And too many details leads to distraction.

Keep your stories tight.

Remember these three principles and you can write great fundraising stories for your organization. It is a skill you will use over and over again. And your stories will become more effective as you do.



After reading Lesson #3

Your assignment for today is to write a short story you can use in your next fundraising pitch. Remember, your stories should be about the donor or a service recipient. If possible, it should be about someone who has not yet received your services. And it should be simple. Nothing too complicated.

Good luck!

Assignment: Think of a story you want to tell to influence donors to give and fill out your sheet today.
<https://did.li/Cc9ql>





Lesson #4

Putting It All Together

You are starting to put it all together. You understand how to frame the problem that your organization addresses. You know to focus the donor on a single service recipient. You have learned to use words that make the donor feel elated about giving to your organization... like they have saved or transformed a life.

You now have the storytelling strategy as your disposal. And as you use these tools, you are becoming donor-centric. Because when you frame the problem according to the donor....

When you focus on a single person in need....

When you make special efforts to make donors feel special...

You train your mind to think from the donor's perspective. You create good habits for yourself that will result in more effective fundraising.

You are naturally and organically rewiring your brain to think like a donor.



This lesson offers simple psychology hacks that will further improve your messaging. Of course, you won't use every tip and trick here in every fundraising message. But the more you use them, the more you speak directly to your donor.

If the goal is to present the greatest case for giving you can, these hacks will motivate donors to give.



1. Urgency - To inspire action, the need must be immediate. If you don't give donors a reason to give right now, they won't feel the need to, even if they believe in your cause. They'll give in a week or three months or next year.

The alternative is to tell them that their help is needed now. Every second they delay is another layer or problem that must be solved.

2. Remove Jargon - In a previous lesson, I asked you to read your mission statement, then rewrite it from memory. Don't rely on your mission statement to explain your organization. Mission statements are necessary, and there is a time and place for them. But when you're making an ask, you want to use clear, plain language. Language that people use in everyday life.

Often, mission statements contain multiple verbs or adjectives. Boards want them to be as inclusive as possible. "We need them to know that we also ENGAGE the students in addition to EDUCATING them." That's great, and it's important for them to be precise about their organizational goals.

But your goal here is to empower donors to make a change. And the most effective way to do this is by using words that they use. Speak on your donors' terms.

3. "Without you." One of my favorite psychological hacks. Psychologically, we all respond quicker to what would happen WITHOUT our help than with it. Consider it the FOMO effect. It's one thing to tell donors that they can feed a child for a day. It's another to tell them that without their help, a child will go meal-less yet again.

This ties directly with the next tip.

4. Let them know what is at stake. Their gift is important. Make sure you tell donors that again and again. It matters to your service recipient whether donors give or not. Be clear about that. An easy way to accomplish this is by describing what will happen without their gift.

5. Don't make the problem too big. While we paint the problem as vividly as we can, we don't want to make the problem seem too difficult to solve. Make sure the situation you describe is fixable. This is another key reason to tell stories about single individuals. Donors will feel a stronger connection to a SINGLE recipient they can help (like curing someone of a disease) than they will a massive problem (like curing a whole demographic of a disease).



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After reading Lesson #4

Your assignment today is to revisit your “You” statement you created in Lesson #2. You should have a printout or handwritten copy of it accessible.

Take a look at it and complete this worksheet: <https://did.li/TnA5q>





Lesson #5

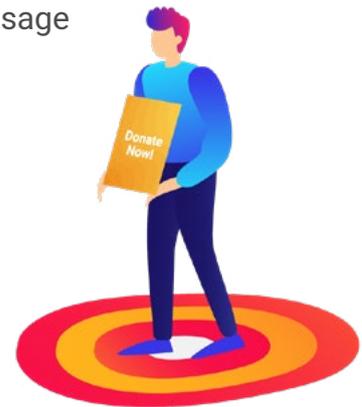
Emotion. Repetition. BOY.

I hope now you have more confidence in your fundraising message. Remember, the art of good fundraising is like any other skill. It must be sharpened and honed. It should be tailored for each particular audience.

Each interaction with a donor is another learning experience. If you pay attention, you'll start to pick up on what works in your pitch and what does not. Delivering a good fundraising message is an endless pursuit.

There are lots of “rules” to follow, and the art of crafting a message shouldn't be overwhelming.

That's why, in our final lesson, we will address how to keep all of this information in mind each time you communicate on behalf of your organization.



Last lesson, I wrote that by following these best practices, you are training your mind to put the donor at the center of all communication.

It is undoubtedly difficult to remember the framework for donor-centric fundraising.

So here are the most important elements of a compelling message. Follow these, and the rest will follow.



1. Emotional

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” - {Maya Angelou}

Make your donors FEEL something. Make them feel the pain and suffering of the people your organization serves. Make them feel proud to be a part of your winning organization. Make them feel like a hero who alleviated the pain and suffering of the people you serve. Make your donors feel.

“
**Make your
donors FEEL
something.**

Stat sheets are not as effective as a compelling tug of the heartstrings. Ask yourself if your pitch is emotional before you deliver it. If the answer is no, you may want to rework it so that donors come away inspired, elated, and eager to step in and save the day.

2. Repetitive

“Repetition is the mother of learning, the father of action, which makes it the architect of accomplishment.” - {Zig Ziglar}

The most effective commercials aren’t always the most creative or witty. Most of the time, the most effective commercials are the ones played every single commercial break, even if viewers roll their eyes the second they appear on screen.

Repetition is a good thing. We humans need to be told something over and over and over again for it to seep in.

It is through repetition that you establish your credibility. Through repetition, you establish brand familiarity.

3. Because Of You

“‘BOY’ stands for ‘Because Of You.’ It means you never lose a chance to credit donors for the good work your organization does. Make it a habit to include ‘Because Of You’ with everything you say.” - {Jeff Brooks}

I love this rule.

Every time you mention one of your programs or your organization, see if you can add the words “Because of you...”

If you can't, it either means that you need to change the sentence to a “you” sentence or it means you are simply bragging about something inconsequential for a compelling case to give.

“We save endangered panda bears” becomes “BECAUSE OF YOU, we save endangered panda bears.”

“More bottles were recycled in our community this year than ever before...BECAUSE OF YOU.”



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And if you end up with something like this, “Our Executive Director is a renowned speaker who has lectured in 12 countries...” and you can't meaningfully add “because of you,” it's a likely sign that the donor won't find this statement compelling.

You and I are communicators, and this rule centers us. It is the guiding principle that will steer us. And the reason that this is important is because it forces us to follow Marketing 101: talking to customers where they are, not where we are.

It forces us to think about our organization from our donors' perspectives. It is the antidote for the curse of knowledge, knowing too much about how/why we do what we do.

To help you remember these guidelines, I've created a printable cheatsheet for you to hang up by your desk. Let this sheet guide you so you keep the most important elements of a fundraising message front and center at all times.

Find your printable sheet here: <https://did.li/Z7oCN>

This concludes our course! Hope you enjoyed it and feel empowered to raise more money for your life-changing cause.

If you are ready to take your fundraising to the next level, please schedule a 15-minute call with one of the CauseMatch fundraising experts so they can learn about the opportunities for your organization to reach new heights!



CauseMatch Fundraising: Your All-In-One Online Fundraising Solution

An online platform, mentorship, and creative services will help you grow your nonprofit's bottom line.



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