

Inspired Giving: It's up to us to midwife the connection

By Deborah Neff, Nonprofit writer

During my many years' working with nonprofits and NGOs, I've been profoundly inspired by the tireless devotion and commitment of organization staff and volunteers.

Addressing some of the direst needs—and hopes—of humankind, their beneficiaries often live in abhorrent conditions and have severely limited opportunities to succeed. But for many—especially smaller nonprofits, fundraising remains a challenge.

Is it possible that, jaded by daunting uphill battles, your nonprofit is underestimating the generosity of its audience? If this is the case, there is hope: when given the information, insight, and experiences your audience needs to understand the lives, struggles, and triumphs of the people your organization serves, readers will become more engaged and more willing donate their time and money. But your content needs to be relevant to their lives and speak to their need for meaning.

In her book, *The Soul of Money* (2003), global activist and charity fundraiser Lynne Twist speaks about money as an instrument of soul: a conduit or tool, where money is like water or energy that can be directed for ill or for aid. Taking a stand for what one believes through giving is an act symbolically charged with power, value, and empowerment, for both the giver and receiver. As Twist notes, the poor are hungry and the rest of us are hungry for lives of meaning. Charitable gifts of time and money take us out of our self-focused worlds, helping us to feel more connected to our human family and part of something greater than ourselves.

As nonprofit staff, writers, and volunteers, we are midwives for the flow of funds, serving as mediators and bridges between our funders and beneficiaries. We need to recognize that we are in a prime position to engage our audiences and donors into relevant dialogue and community with our staff and project beneficiaries.

So, let's give our funders the benefit that people will *want* to give and partner when they are met on their own terms. This is where relevant, consistent, donor-centered content becomes a driving factor in bringing donors, staff, volunteers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries into meaningful relationship.

Fortunately, there are many examples of organizations who know how to engage their audiences in meaningful community. Take charity: water, for example, where experiencing and sharing stories person-to-person on the web has raised the organization over \$150 million. "Leading with storytelling and focusing on the relationship can reap stronger long-term rewards than just asking for money can," says charity: water's founder, Paull Young. When people are connected in a personal way to your cause, they will be more willing to donate or volunteer.

For example, participants in Best Friends Animal Society share their stories through

user-generated content and the use of mobile apps, while Big Brothers Big Sisters share stories on their YouTube channel, which people then share on their websites and Facebook pages. And we have the time-tested strategy of Save the Children, where donors and beneficiaries become “family.” These nonprofits have come to recognize the value of creating and maintaining connection with our people through shared, meaningful experiences, in which our blogs, videos, and other content speak to our audiences’ core values and commitments.

With social media and the proliferation of online grass-roots movements, crowd funding, and user-generated content, donors are waking up to the possibility of working in close partnership with beneficiaries, nonprofit staff and volunteers, and with each other to address the critical challenges of our times. But it’s up to us to midwife the connection through placing the needs of our audience front and center.

*This blog post appeared on my previous website in 2019.