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Five Easy Ways to Build Rapport with Your Donors

by [George Crankovic](#), on 3/23/18 8:00 AM



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Donors love to give but hate to be persuaded. That's both the problem and the opportunity we face every time we create a fundraising appeal, whether direct mail or digital.

It's true that donors love to give. It makes them feel good, and they like knowing they're making a difference in the world. It's a powerful motivator.

But on the other hand, they don't like feeling they're being persuaded or pushed into doing something. If they do feel pushed, they'll probably withhold their support.

So, if we want our fundraising appeals to be effective, it's important to engage donors in a way that they'll accept. If the messaging comes off as too pushy or too salesy, we risk turning donors off.

What to do?

One of the best ways to engage donors is to build a rapport with them, show that we share a common ground, that we're working together with them to solve a problem. Here are five easy ways to do that.

1. USE LOGIC



This is probably not a gooney bird

The classic if-then statement in logic is a mainstay in all kinds of persuasive writing, and for good reason. The “if” part presents a premise, and if your donor accepts it, the “then” part leads your donor to where you want him or her to go. For our purposes in fundraising, it might work like this:

If you worry about the endangered gooney bird like I do—and want to know how to save them—then you’re going to be glad you got this letter.

An approach like this speaks directly to what’s most important for your donor—gooney birds—while at the same time presenting the letter writer as someone who’s equally concerned about the gooney bird and, even better, has a solution to the problem. You’re speaking your donor’s language.

2. ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR DONOR’S COMMITMENT

One of the best areas of common ground is with donors who’ve given before. They know your mission and trust it. So it’s natural to approach donors on that basis, like this:

You’re such a generous and committed supporter of the Save the Gooney Bird Society (thank you!), and I know how much you care about gooney birds and the threats they face.

That’s good, since it does create rapport. But instead of stopping there, we can go a step further and work in the offer, presenting our donor with an opportunity to take action, like this:

I know you care about the gooney bird since you’re such a generous supporter, and that’s why I think you’ll love knowing that—right now—your gift will double in impact to protect gooney birds and their habitats up and down the coast.

But what about the prospects in your file who maybe haven’t given or are lapsed? You can still build rapport with them, like this:

I may not know you personally and I may not have heard from you in a while, but the fact that you’re reading my letter tells me you care as deeply about our endangered gooney birds as I do.

3. CREATE A SITUATION

Another way to build rapport is to bring the donor into your office or facility, creating a situation that your donor can relate to, like this:

I was sitting at my desk when I heard the news, and I slumped in my chair, with the wind knocked out of me, as I learned that a precious, endangered gooney bird was killed by a poacher.

An approach like this brings your donor into your inner circle, and that familiarity helps create a bond.

4. MAKE A CONFESSION

An effective way of creating common ground with donors is to admit something. This instantly makes you seem more human, more relatable, and more likeable. After all, you usually only admit to things with your friends, right? It might go like this:

I wasn’t always a protector of the gooney bird. It’s true. I realize that may surprise you. I had to see one of these beautiful creatures with my own eyes before I was struck by how magnificent they are. It changed me.

5. ADD A PHOTO

This last way to build rapport is often overlooked, but it can be very effective. Research tells us that one of the first things donors do when they get a letter is to look for the signature to see who it's from. Placing a photo of the letter signer near the signature puts a face to the name, and that's instant rapport.

The photo should be simple and uncluttered with no strange things going on in the background, like a wall hanging that appears to be coming out of the person's head. The photo should also show the person looking straight ahead to create eye contact with the viewer. A slight smile will make the person look friendly and welcoming, like someone you'd like to know.

Building rapport with donors doesn't have to be difficult. Of course, a complete approach to messaging involves strategy and data so that the right appeal goes to the right donor. But these five ways to build rapport are signposts for engaging with donors more effectively—and on their own terms. The result is fundraising that works better for donors and for the nonprofit.



George Crankovic is an experienced, award-winning fundraising copywriter and strategist. He helps nonprofits engage their donors through multichannel direct response, combining strategy, messaging, offer, and audience to maximize results. An in-demand writer, George has published articles in Fundraising Success magazine, Nonprofit Pro magazine, and other national publications. He is a guest blogger at Jeff Brooks's Future Fundraising Now site, and he blogs at www.marketing-fundraising.com.

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