

## Fundraising Psychology Part One: Creating a Giving Mindset

Marketing and fundraising are becoming more and more data-driven. We have seen huge leaps in the way data can be acquired and analyzed to make a fundraising campaign more successful. But inevitably, we run into questions that can't be answered by our client relationship management system (CRM).

Fortunately for the not-for-profit community, altruism and charity are intriguing subjects to psychologists. They want to know what thought processes lead people to give away their limited resources. In the last few decades, there has been a great deal of research aimed at uncovering what conditions encourage and discourage giving. This knowledge can be a valuable asset to organizations looking to maximize their fundraising results.

In part one of our four-part series on the psychology of fundraising, we will highlight the findings of research on the psychology of giving and explain how not-for-profit organizations can use this knowledge to create more effective fundraising campaigns.

### The Time-Ask Effect

Most people are unable to donate to every not-for-profit organization every time they are asked, but what makes a person willing to donate one day but not the next? It could be any number of things that cannot necessarily be controlled, but researchers have found that *the way* are asked has an impact on whether a donor will say "yes" or "no."

Studies have shown that people behave differently when they are thinking about money and when they are thinking about time. To explore these behavioral differences, psychologists have used *priming* to induce a money-focused or time-focused mindset in study participants.



**PRIMING:** When psychologists apply a certain stimulus to a subject, it plants the idea in their mind and the subject often returns to it in future activities.

In one study, participants were asked the following questions but in differing orders:

“How interested are you in volunteering for HopeLab?”

“How interested are you in making a donation to HopeLab?”

Subjects were then given the opportunity to donate some or all of the \$10 compensation they received. Those who were first asked about volunteering their time (*Time-Ask*) donated more of their money to HopeLab. The group that was first asked about making a donation (*Money-Ask*) actually donated less than the control group that was not primed with either question.

**TAKEAWAY:** *Focus on cultivating donors and developing a robust volunteer program. Asking supporters for their time first may lead to larger gifts down the line.*

It turns out that when people are primed to think about money first, they are more focused on achieving their own ends with the resources they have. They think more analytically and give more conservatively. But the way people think about time is fundamentally different from the way they think about money. Because people

measure time in the experiences they have and those experiences provoke emotions, the *Time-Ask* puts people in a more emotional mindset and they give more generously.

### Whose Feelings to Focus On

Since an emotional mindset is more generous than an analytical mindset, it makes sense that fundraisers should use the emotions involved in their cause to impact their audience. One way to create an emotional impact is to ask the potential donor to take the perspective of the person in need of aid. This perspective-taking can happen in two ways:

- Imagining the feelings of the victim
- Imagining one’s own feelings if you were in the victim’s place

Both of these methods create sympathy, but they differ in who the donor’s focus is on. When the donor considers the victim’s feelings, they are focused on the welfare of the other and are motivated to lessen their

**TAKEAWAY:** *It’s a subtle difference, but when asking a donor to consider the plight of your constituents, it is better to ask them to imagine the victim’s feelings than to imagine themselves in the victim’s situation. Keep this in mind the next time you are writing an e-mail or direct mail appeal that tries to draw the reader into a scene you are describing.*

suffering. But when a donor is asked to imagine themselves in the victim's position, it creates personal distress, which motivates the donor to alleviate their own discomfort. In the latter case, the donor is thinking egoistically and may be less willing to give away their own resources.

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