

## Why Communicate? To Spur Action

We use words to convey our messages and raise money. It's reasonable to assume, therefore, that communications are somehow about getting people to read.

But, in fact, that's not the case.

Fundraising communications are NOT about getting people to read.

Fundraising communications are about getting people to ACT...if not immediately, then sooner or later.

**Action: yes. Reading: optional.**

Look at it another way. Which would you rather have, if you could only choose from these two options:

- Someone who reads your stuff but never responds?
- Or someone who doesn't read your stuff but sends you a gift?

Obviously, you'd choose the latter, as would anyone with a goal to make. It's not ideal, but it pays the bills.

I bring up the distinction between reading and acting for an important reason that has to do with your workload: I want to release you from the burden of worrying so much about writing newsletter articles, white papers and other longer prose pieces.

The reality is, people will read very little of what you send them. They don't have time in their busy, complex lives. And most nonprofit communications are not sufficiently interesting to win devoted readers.

This doesn't mean they don't love you, incidentally. If the people on the receiving end are donors, they *do* love you (well, they *like* you anyway). But they're time-challenged and fiercely assaulted each day by thousands of other messages.

**They are casual readers at best**

If you think of your target audience as hungry readers, you will tend to fill your pages with prose, to satisfy their appetite.

And it will be mostly indifferent prose, it grieves me to predict.

I mean no offense. I have no doubt your writing will be factual and functional. But will it be entertaining, energetic, surprising? Will it be newsstand quality, dipped in chocolate and wrapped in 18-carat gold foil? Probably not, and that's too bad. Because entertainment, energy, and surprise make all the difference to the reader. Absent those qualities, people soon depart the page.

Keep in mind the difference between the reader you are right this moment – and the casual reader (your donors and prospects).

You're reading this page because you want to learn something that will help you raise more money and develop career skills. You consider this information important to your professional success. So you're motivated to trudge on, even if you find my writing dreadful.

Casual readers are not that motivated...unless you're very, very good at communication skills other than long prose. This book teaches those skills.

### **Donors as action figures**

I like to think of donors and prospects as action figures. And I thank a small boy in a French village for the idea.

This young fellow was playing in front of his house with his "men." Simone Joyaux, my wife, leaned down to exchange a few friendly words with him. She asked him in French about his "soldiers." The boy was shy, no more than four years of age. Yet he corrected her. They were not soldiers, he said. They were "le action figures."

Like the boy, I love *my* action figures: my donors and prospects. I know I can bring them to life through my deep respect for their emotional needs and for their time (as you'll also learn to do in this book). And once I bring them to life, they will win my battle for me. And in exchange I will celebrate their efforts. They are the heroes.

The fundraising industry calls that last little bit being "donor-centric." Ken Burnett calls it "relationship fundraising." It comes down to the same thing: nothing happens without someone outside your organization acting on your behalf.

### **What kinds of actions?**

If communicating with donors and prospects is about causing action to happen, what kinds of actions are we talking about? A partial list would include:

- giving to your current direct mail appeal
  - making a matching gift
  - giving to your building campaign
  - buying a membership
  - signing up for a monthly giving program
  - making a bequest on your organization's behalf
  - contributing to an endowment fund
  - volunteering
  - signing a petition
  - attending an event
  - writing a letter in support of some project or position
  - answering a survey
  - subscribing to your e-newsletter
- ...and the list goes on and on.