

## Using Emotions in Fundraising

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### **What is the role of emotions in fundraising? Should Christians write emotional fundraising appeals?**

I know that opinions are divided on this matter and that some fundraisers consider emotional appeals to be ‘manipulative.’ Although emotions can be used to manipulate that is not always the case or, role of emotions fundraising. However, in order to understand the role of emotions in prompting people to give we need to think about the purpose of a fundraising appeal.

*What does a fundraising appeal aim to achieve?* The main purpose of an appeal is to motivate current or prospective donors to stop and read the letter you sent to them, to reach out for the cheque book or bank details and send a cheque or, fill in a standing order form *on the same day* they got your appeal. The fact of the matter is that a good fundraising letter which stirs up the reader’s emotions can motivate them to respond promptly with a gift.

In a nutshell, direct mail fundraising is about engaging current and prospective donors’ minds and hearts and inviting immediate support. And, if you want to write effective appeals that get results you should stop listening to some people (*including some senior team members, or trustees*) who say ‘*I know what I support. I don’t read any fundraising letters. They are emotional.*’

They are entitled to their opinions and you must respect that. But, you also do well to remember that there are thousands of individuals around the country who appreciate hearing from charities like yours. These people are interested in what you are doing and they enjoy sending donations in to support your work. So, when you write your next fundraising letter bear in mind that you are writing to these interested people.

### **So, who is likely to respond to your charity’s appeals?**

According to our research published in **Why Christians Give** report (2010) the most likely respondents to your fundraising appeals are well educated Baby

Boomers in their 50s and 60s. They are evangelical Christians with deeply held beliefs and values who have a strong sense of mission, justice and compassion.

They are people who feel content, secure and grateful for what they have received from God and have a desire to leave a *legacy of faith and good works* to their children, churches and communities.

Several donors who commented on the fundraising appeals they receive from charities stated that inspiring and emotional stories motivated them to give towards a charity's work. Often, the emotional connection between a donor and a charity sprang from shared values and beliefs. What's more, that emotional connection was strengthened from the effective use of newsletter, appeals and project updates. Many donors saw these communications as tools that offered them opportunities get involved in interesting work or help people they cared about.

### **What are some of the emotions that motivate donors to give?**

If you take a closer look at the array of appeals that you might have received in recently you would notice that one of the biggest emotional motivators in direct mail fundraising is *anger*. Righteous anger against injustice, persecution, poverty, discrimination works well in fundraising. Why? Because, anger is an emotion that can stir people into practical action like campaigning, giving, praying, etc.

Another emotion used in fundraising is *fear*, especially *fear of losing a loved one*. Some charities, especially those involved in the fight against incurable diseases use the emotion of fear very effectively. Do you remember the fundraising campaign run a prominent charity fighting against cancer a few years ago showing a group of a three school girls and saying something along these lines: *One of these girls will not be around in 10 years time. She is likely to die of cancer. Help us in the fight against cancer, etc.*

Other emotional motivators, especially in a Christian context, are the desire to follow God's calling to participate in Christian outreach and the desire to invest in something worthwhile from a Kingdom perspective.

Many Christians, especially those who have been taught about generosity and the responsibility of supporting missions are motivated by a desire to be faithful stewards who honour God with their wealth and possessions.

Few Christian charities use this emotional motivation well to bless their supporters and encourage them into greater generosity. However, most Christian charities are so *stuck in what they are doing* in terms of their initiatives and projects that they don't seem to be able to step into a donor's shoes and see their work through the donor's eyes.

Other motivating emotions that can work well in direct mail fundraising are: reinforcing a donor's participation and a sense of belonging to a wider community, compassion for the poor, a desire to make a lasting impact on a

community, leaving a lasting legacy of faith for new generations, the desire to stay connected with a dynamic network, restoring hope and dignity to the poor, wanting to see something accomplished that will benefit many people – like building a school, homes or a hospital, etc.

Every time a good fundraiser is about to write an appeal they down some of the emotional reason that are like to prompt donors into action. Then they weave these reasons into the fundraising appeal creating various points of contact and connection between the donor and the cause.

### **The recipe for fundraising success: Mixing emotions with reason**

As you have probably gathered by now, I believe that when emotional motivations are used with integrity in a fundraising appeal they are likely to generate a good response. However, a robust fundraising programme can not survive and grow simply on emotional or emergency appeals.

In real life we connect with people around us using both emotional and rational languages. We show appreciation to those who care for us, we are long and brief in our communications depending on the occasion. The same principles of communications can be applied to our relationship with our charity's current and prospective donors.

That is why effective direct mail programmes often contain both emotional and rational appeals that tell touching stories of a charity's work and talk about new activities and how they would impact beneficiaries lives. In addition to this, good direct mail programmes contain thank you letters, newsletters or email updates that show appreciation for the donor's support and keep them informed about the progress of the projects they are interested in.

In an era of information overload it is this *mix of emotions and reason* continually expressed in fresh and creative ways that will help your charity build stronger relationships with your supporters.

