



Telling Stories To Inspire Action

Notes to accompany webinar for Environmental Funders Network, July 2020

What's in it?

This pack includes, where you can access further resources, many of which are free, as well as notes from the webinar and the slides.

FUTHER RESOURCES

A) FREE e-book.

This e-book, was inspired by interviews with over 20 very successful fundraisers during the pandemic.

Power through the Pandemic – seven ways to raise funds with major donors, trusts and corporates, even now, by Rob Woods.

Download it for free here: www.brightspotfundraising.co.uk/power

B) The Fundraising Bright Spots podcast

For lots of examples of fundraising success, using these and many other strategies, you can subscribe for free to my weekly podcast Fundraising Bright Spots show, which is available from I-tunes, Spotify and Stitcher.

C) *The Fundraiser Who Wanted More*, by Rob Woods

This book, available from Amazon and on kindle, explores the ideas of story-telling and influence to boost fundraising income in more depth.

D) Corporate Partnerships Mastery and Major Gifts Mastery Programmes

If you would like more in depth boost to your major donor and corporate partnerships skills and income, these two 6-month Programmes will run from October 2020 – March 2021.

Corporate Partnerships Mastery 2020 / 2021

<https://www.brightspotfundraising.co.uk/service/corporate-partnerships-mastery-programme/>

Major Gifts Mastery Programme 2020/21

<https://www.brightspotfundraising.co.uk/service/mastery-programme/>

E) Other training courses and online training club

You can find out more about our inhouse (virtual) training days and our **Bright Spot Members Club** at our website:

<https://www.brightspotfundraising.co.uk/services/>

NOTES FROM WEBINAR

Introduction

In the outstanding book on story-telling and influence, *Made to Stick*, Chip and Dan Heath talk about how harmful The Curse of Knowledge can be to our efforts. They show that if you have worked in an organisation for more than a week or two, you usually absorb ways of thinking and talking about its work that are different from the way outsiders think and talk.

I have found this idea applies to charities as much as companies.

Two key challenges the Curse of Knowledge often causes are:

- a) That we use a tone of language which is less meaningful to others than ourselves
- b) We say too much.

But one reason this second challenge is hard to solve is that even if we're aware we should say less, it's hard to know what kind of message to prioritise.

In my book, *The Fundraiser Who Wanted More*, I assert that the most sure-fire way to overcome the effects of the Curse of Knowledge is to include more real examples (or stories) in our communication.

In this webinar, we share a range of techniques and tools we have found helpful in doing this in practice. We do our best to bring them to life using examples from the charity sector, including both environmental and non-environmental charities.

How do real examples / stories help?

There are many ways using this tactic helps would-be influencers, be they parents, marketeers or fundraisers.

For instance, real examples are a way to convey evidence; they are memorable compared other messages; they simplify the complex; they help people feel as well as think. In the Rokia experiment, conducted by Professor Robert Cialdini, people gave twice as much money when they heard information about the plight of a specific individual compared to when they hear about a large number of people.

Even if it's difficult to find neat stories to do with your charity, the more specific you can be when describing the problem and the impact of your work, the better your chances of helping your supporters connect (and take action).

1) Option to focus on 'hero species'.

Jennifer Few from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust shared a strategy they are using to bring to life general messages through specific examples. In particular, they have chosen to bring some of their projects to life by focusing on six hero species.

Clearly this strategy is not possible (or perhaps appropriate) for every environmental charity, but having thought through their options, Jennifer and her colleagues believe it brings clear

advantages in making key messages simpler and more concrete. (Simple and Concrete are two of the key principles prescribed in Made to Stick).

The idea is not that these species are more important to the Yorkshire environment than others, but that these focal points make it easier to give specific details and share more stories.

2) Team-work, shared understanding and valuing the benefits of this focused messaging

The key thing I took from interviewing Jennifer is how hard she and her colleagues throughout the charity work to understand the point of view of the different parts of the charity, in order to achieve common goals. They have had a lot of conversations, and one result is that the service delivery and policy teams are reassured about the benefits of choosing to focus messages disproportionately on a few species.

3) Search out the different angles that your supporters care about.

Its all too easy to communicate the value of a project from only one point of view (that which is most important within the charity). In fact, there are often several valid reasons why a project might be worthwhile. Understanding why your (potential) supporters might care and being willing to find examples that bring those ideas to life is not easy.

Michael at RSPB told me he has sought information and examples to bring to life at least three different effects a project can have: habitat / species; climate change; and people.

For instance, he is able to tell donors that the nature-friendly farm is both great for wildlife (the butterfly count is up 200%) and is great for farmers' yields (this is one reason nearly every neighbouring farm has adopted the same practices.) He is able to communicate the value of the nature-friendly farm in terms of people / communities as well as habitats / species.

4) The story arc.

When studying story-telling at City Lit, my teacher taught us the many benefits of a very simple four-part story arc.

(Please note, this is not the only way to edit a story – see the following section for an approach that conveys evidence more succinctly – but I have found this structure usually works best when you want to tell the story in a way that develops the narrative.)

- A) Who or what
- B) Problem
- C) Action
- D) Result

I've noticed that without this tool, most fundraisers make various choices which reduce the power of the examples and stories they share. For instance, it is all too easy to:

- **Neglect to state any result, or punchline.**

This has the effect of sending people the signal that 'our charity does stuff'. We don't know if it works or not, but this is the activity we do. I appreciate, that for some causes

and types of project we don't have a final result yet. When this is true, three options to try are a) any interim results / mini steps forward in this journey; b) results achieved in a similar project by us or anywhere else in the world. And if all else fails, if truly no-one in the world has ever done anything remotely like this before, then c) be able to tell supporters the name of a specific authority that has endorsed your approach as worthwhile.

- **Miss out / underplay the problem.**

The most common pitfall is to do step C too early, and talk about your solution, what your charity does, without first helping us connect to step B – the specific problem faced by that habitat / that animal / that part of the planet. The more clear and precise you can be about that difficult, powerful problem, the more persuaded we will be if you tell us in Step D that your charity has a solution that works.

5) One sentence examples / find the Big Fat Claims

The story arc in the previous section is not the only way to tell a story, but I've found it usually works best for examples when the plot develops over time. It is also possible, and valuable to just state examples without so much detail, ie you are essentially summarising a result (either a bad result when you were not there, such as the plough blades breaking due to the compacted earth, or a good result, such as the environment-friendly farm being so successful that the neighbouring farms followed suit.

To find these, I was taught to do the 7:3:1 editing technique.

First, in a notebook write down the story in 6 or 7 bullet points.

Now write the same story in only 3 bullet points. ie you have to leave lots out. What would you leave out?

Now sum up the whole example in one sentence. You cannot include all four of the main ideas from the four step story arc now. But usually what is left is some essence of the result or shift, be it good or bad.

These short, one (or two) sentence summarised examples help you convey the sense that these results are common, not one off. I've found they are powerful in written, digital and spoken fundraising.

6) Ask for your supporters' stories

Neil from Earthwatch wanted to re-kindle relationships with the hundreds of people who had taken part in the charity's expeditions in the past, but the charity had not kept in touch with them since 2014. With the charities 50 year anniversary approaching next year, he decided to make contact, asking if they'd be willing to talk to him and share their story, (of how Earthwatch had affected their life in terms of environmental awareness and activity). Because of the lockdown, in March he made this request by letter.

- He sent 650 letters.
- Over 100 people replied.
- So far he has conducted over 80 Zoom conversations, collecting many powerful stories, including one person who has returned to volunteer at a rhino conservation project 30 times since her original expedition.
- The charity plans to release 50 stories next year, one per week, and to create a book celebrating all 50 stories.

In episode 25 of my podcast, The Fundraising Bright Spots show, Digital fundraising expert Emily Casson also recommended the tactic of inviting your supporters to share their stories. Clearly Neil's was just one way to do this, but if you would like to find human stories, and your charity struggles to find this angle, exploring this approach is an option.

7) Include examples / stories in thank you emails and letters

This is not a new idea, but I found Becky's example fascinating. She included the simple real example in the thank you email to the person who was interested in giving £500. The donor then decided to double her gift to £1000 instead. Since that point, Becky received three more £1000 gifts.

Becky rolled out this overall, story-focused approach to her whole team when she got to Stroke Association. She told me it was a key factor in income increasing by 210% in 14 months.

8) Brainstorm more opportunities to tell stories

Lynda Harwood-Compton wanted more ways for Animals Asia's stories to more regularly and directly reach her mid and major supporters. In episode 20 of the Fundraising Bright Spots podcast, she explains how she and her colleagues set up a webinar series 'The Inside Track...' so that the supporters could hear directly from the front line, for instance, a bear sanctuary in Vietnam. These have been hugely popular, increased engagement and subsequent giving. She told me a fabulous side benefit has been increased understanding between the fundraising and service delivery teams.

Lynda also explains that last year she wanted a way to create more opportunities to tell stories when meeting supporters. She arranged for a picture of a particular bear she visited in the sanctuary to be printed on her business card. (When able to meet face to face) at the start of a meeting she introduces the bear when she introduces herself. This invariably leads into more examples / discussion about the animals the charity helps, earlier in a meeting.

9) Create your own story bank.

A key habit which many fundraisers who join the Major Gifts Mastery Programme and Corporate Mastery Programme adopt is to get a notebook and use it to collect real examples and stories. Clearly another level to this is the implementation or improvement of any electronic system for collecting and managing stories. But I've found the powerful step of each fundraiser taking responsibility for content that resonates for them, is an easy step that everyone can do, even if improving the overall process can take longer / more organisational will to get right.

10) The Magic Formula for creating a persuasive case.

On my Major Gifts and Corporate Mastery Programmes and in the Bright Spot Members Club, the system I teach to make it easier to create a persuasive case consists of 7 questions.

Some key principles that inform this approach:

- Over all, the two Big Picture questions are 'how can I help the other person connect to a problem they care about?' and 'how can I help them believe this charity (ie with their donation) is able to solve it?' The seven questions in the formula are designed to help form a persuasive argument around these two concepts.
- Be able to talk about and write about the problem (your charity solves) before you go into much depth about 'what' you do.
- Include more real examples than charities normally do.
- Pointing out what's not immediately obvious about the problem (and impact) are often very helpful.
- Cialdini's Principles of influence, such as Authority and Social Proof, are also helpful.

Here are the seven questions which we explored in the webinar using the Gough Island, Tristan Albetross example and then the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust peatland example:

The Bright Spot Magic Formula for finding persuasive things to say / write about your charity project / research.

Help us connect to the problem

- A) What is the essence of the problem and the consequences of that problem?
- B) What is not necessarily obvious about that problem?
- C) Is there an example, story or anecdote which helps bring the problem to life?

Help us believe your solution works

- A) What is an example or story which helps show your solution works?
- B) Are you able to show your solution works through numbers?
- C) The psychology of influence – how could you use authority or social proof to help reassure that this solution works?
- D) What is your solution, and what is the special ingredient?

Stay in touch

I hope you found the webinar helpful. We'd love to hear how you get on. Do stay in touch via twitter (@woods_rob), Linked In or our website – www.brightspotfundraising.co.uk.