



your donor in 3-D

A Good Works Whitepaper by Fraser Green

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YOUR DONOR IN THREE DIMENSIONS

The premise of this paper is pretty simple.

Your donor lives – moment to moment – in three parallel states of awareness:

- the rational state– where thinking and calculation operates non-stop
- the emotional state – where spontaneous feelings affect behaviour and thoughts, and
- the spiritual state – where the soul seeks fulfillment at a deep and profound human level.

All of us who raise funds for a living speak to our donors’ brains. Some of us speak to our donors’ hearts. Very few of us even think of connecting with our donors’ souls.

Yet, if we really want to form deep human relationships – whether with our donors, our spouses, our closest friends or our kids – we need to reach others on all three levels.

WHY DOES 3-D MATTER?

Again, it’s startlingly simple.

Forging a deeper human connection with your donor leads to a more loyal bond between you. Loyal donors are your most profitable – both this year and well into the future.

One of our fundraising gurus, Roger Craver, states that donor loyalty is now ‘the holy grail of fundraising’. We couldn’t agree more. Loyal donors translate directly to the bottom line in a big, big way.

There’s no question about it. The biggest challenge our clients are facing today is donor retention. The most effective way to renew donors is to build their loyalty to you. And – the most effective way we know to build that loyalty is to speak honestly and openly to your donors in all of their three dimensions.

In his book ‘Building Donor Loyalty’, British fundraising author Adrian Sargeant demonstrates that increasing donor retention by only 10% leads to a 50% increase in net revenue. Corporate marketers have preached for years that it’s five times less expensive to retain a customer (or, in our case, donor) than it is to find a new one. We believe this multiple has grown over the past decade.

Let’s look at a simple example of a ‘3-D outcome’. Jacqueline Hassell started making donations to a breast cancer charity after her sister was diagnosed with the disease in the 1970s. Over the next twenty-five years, she made annual gifts of about \$50 – which totalled \$1,250 in her lifetime of giving.



This giving is obviously valuable in and of itself. But there's more to the story. Jacqueline formed a deep bond with the charity. She became a volunteer – and gave an even bigger gift of time than money. She also became an ambassador for the cause and recruited a dozen of her friends to become consistent donors.

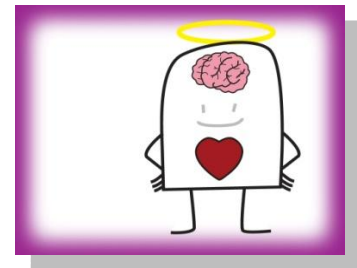
Why did she do all this?

- Jacqueline knew that the charity managed her money well and that the funded research was extending the lives of breast cancer victims. Her brain was persuaded.
- Jacqueline felt a sense of optimism and hope as her involvement deepened. She felt that her giving and involvement were helping others like her sister. Her heart was in it.
- Most importantly, her giving and involvement with the cause and the charity gave her a sense of purpose and meaning. She extended her good works out of pure compassion for others and a desire to make the world a better place. She was giving from her spirit.
- Not long after her sister ultimately succumbed to breast cancer, Jacqueline decided to make a gift to that charity in her will. When Jacqueline died, her final gift amounted to \$32,000 – many times the value of her total lifetime giving. There's no doubt. 3-D connecting is powerful stuff.

MEET GARY

Okay, we couldn't resist it. We had to create an image to represent the donor in 3-D. So may we present you to our friend Gary the donor?

Gary is your visual reminder. To really connect with Gary, you have to make his brain understand you. You need to touch his heart. And, you need to reach up to that halo and connect with his human spirit.



(If you'd like your own image of Gary just pop us an email and we'll send you one. You can pin him to your wall, keep him in your drawer or use him as your new computer screen wallpaper!)

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE THREE D'S

- The brain is the human computer. It alone has the ability to process information. To manipulate numbers. To express itself in language. To conceptualize and synthesize. So, the donor brain is attracted to charities who boast low fundraising costs, efficient and effective program delivery and sensible plans for the future. While the brain is the first dimension talked about here, we argue (strongly!) that it is in fact the least important of the three in the

actual giving process. To us, the brain serves a ‘reality check’ function before the donor exercises her giving behaviour. Often, the brain is like the brake pedal – it’s there at the ready to stop a gift if something doesn’t ‘add up’.

- The heart is the seat of our emotions. We humans are (although we don’t always want to admit it) largely emotional animals. Why is this? Our emotions were grooved into us thousands of years ago in our Darwinian learning of how to best survive and procreate (which at the end of the day is what all species seek to do). We have learned over the millennia how to seek out that which makes us happy and to avoid that which brings pain.

An important note to make about emotions is that they are temporary – and almost always triggered by an external source. None of us has been angry for the entire past week – we experience many emotions each and every day. We experience emotions as a reaction to some stimulus – like the happiness that comes from a surprise gift or compliment.

There are many variations on a handful of emotional themes – with the ‘basics’ being happiness, sadness, anger, fear and guilt. These emotions are often the primary drivers in our giving impulses. (The emotional impulse is then followed by the intellectual filter – but without the impulse the filter doesn’t need to kick in.)

Research note: In a recent Good Works survey of 700 Canadian donors, 95% of respondents said “it just **feels good** to give to worthy causes”.

- Unlike temporary emotions, our spiritual ‘components’ are our permanent characteristics – parts of our deepest, most fundamental human makeup. We’re not basically kind and generous one day, only to be mean and selfish the next.

Our spiritual elements are also inherently internal. They come from within – unlike emotions which are triggered by events or other people. You may have been born with a love for music, animals, children or nature. Our spiritual goals are larger than life – like our quests for serenity, wisdom and compassionate love.

Our spiritual dimension also goes to the realm of beliefs and values. These serve as the compass points for our lives. They give us valuable aid in assessing situations and making choices on a daily basis. They also very much influence our choices when it comes to people. We tend to befriend and fall in love (at least successfully!) with those whose compasses are aligned akin to our own.

Research note: In the same Good Works survey mentioned earlier, 78% of respondents said that their charitable giving was an extension of their **spiritual beliefs**. More than that, 93% said that helping others in need was ‘an **essential** part of their being human’. If that’s not a spiritual value statement, we don’t know what is.



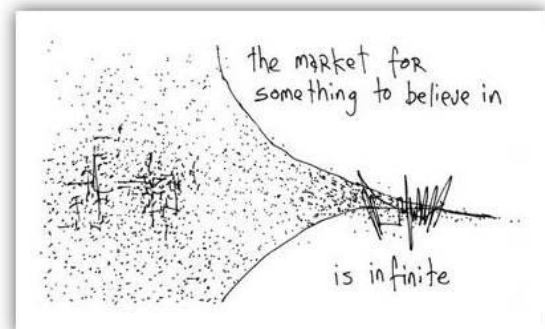
On a closing note to the three dimensions in question, 84% of respondents in the Good Works donor survey said that their giving was one way that they express their heart and soul. Clearly, your donors see themselves in 3-D. Our hope is that you're coming to see them that way too.

THE SAME GIFT FROM THREE PLACES

There's an earthquake in Haiti. Gary (our 3-D cartoon donor) hears all about it in the media. He makes a gift of \$50 to the Red Cross to help with the relief efforts. There could be three distinct ways in which Gary comes to his decision to give:

- His brain does the math. His modest contribution buys a lot in Haiti. He also knows that the Canadian government will leverage his donation with matching funds within a certain time window. Gary is persuaded that his gift will go a long way – and his research and previous brand knowledge assures him that the Red Cross is a trustworthy and effective vehicle through which to help those in need.
- His heart demands a giving impulse. Gary has seen a video clip on YouTube of a child huddled in a rubble-strewn village square. That little boy – he looks like he's about four years old – looks so scared and lonely. Gary feels immense sadness that a defenceless and innocent child should have to go through this alone. He wants the sadness to go away – so he Googles Red Cross and pulls out his VISA card.
- His soul already knows what he must do. As he lies in bed early in the morning, Gary's mind is still full of the images of Haiti he saw on the news last night. He has a sense of 'knowing' that we're all in this together. That part of our human experience is to come to the aid of others in need. He thinks of a principle that he tries to live by – to do unto others as we would have others do unto us. He simply knows that doing something to help those suffering in Haiti is on his agenda for the day. That knowing gives him a sense of peace, contentment deep inside. (He'll leave it to his brain to sort out how much to give and whether to make the gift online or call the 1-800 number.)

In reality, Gary probably doesn't behave in any one of these three ways unilaterally. No doubt his brain, heart and human spirit are all at work simultaneously. And, each donor's three dimensions will operate in a different balance of head, heart and soul. The point is that all three come very much into play in your donors. You have to speak to Gary's three dimensions to fully connect with him.



8 STEPS TO A 3-D CONNECTION

There are many ways to connect meaningfully with other people. But today, let's start with eight of the best we know. These eight will get you off to a great start at deeper donor connection, commitment and loyalty.

It's important to note that you don't have to use ALL eight. In fact, adding just a couple of them will soon make a real difference to the depth of your donor relationships.

We'd rather see you try a couple – and then add one or two at a time as you feel more comfortable and capable with this approach. There's no need to bite off more than you can chew. Take your time and enjoy the ride!

1. **TELL STORIES – LOTS OF STORIES!** We all go on about how fast the world is changing – and it is. The availability of information alone grows exponentially every few years. Yet, where does that information go? Why, into our heads of course! Yet, our heads are pretty ancient things. We are largely the same human beings that we were way before the times of Buddha and Christ (except that we're taller and have better teeth). We have been telling each other stories since we've been living in caves. And, hundreds of thousands of years later, stories are still the most effective way we communicate with each other. Any neurologist worth his salt will tell you that our brains aren't wired for a lot of facts, figures, graphs, dates and names. Our brains are wired to remember and appreciate stories. We learned to listen to stories because they helped us survive. That's pretty hard wiring.
2. **ARE YOUR STORIES FROM SOMEONE?** One of the first things I learned when I became a fundraiser is that 'people give to people'. Human beings are highly social animals. We need to connect. We need to communicate. We need to belong. Your donors will relate more easily to the information you give to them if that information is from a real, live person – and not organization-speak.

One of the reasons that direct mail has been the backbone of annual giving for decades is that fundraising letters (good ones at least) are always signed. They're from someone. And if they're done properly, the person signing the letter has allowed some of herself to show through in the copy. Here's a quick self-test. Go grab your most recent newsletter and last year's annual report. Take a quick cruise through your web site. How many of all those words are actually from someone – written in the first person?

3. **PRESS EMOTIONAL BUTTONS:** Remember, that the impulse to give is usually an emotional one. What are the emotions in your story? Is your protagonist afraid? Hopeful? Stubbornly determined? How about the storyteller? What is she feeling as she tells you about the hero's plight? My colleagues and I often use the 'hanky scale' to rate the emotional quotient of our work. When someone reads something I've written and says 'that's a three hanky piece', I know I've just created something special.



Having said that, PLEASE don't manipulate or exaggerate your emotive content. Say what's real – and say it all. Don't hold back or try to tone a real story down. But if you take liberties or stretch the truth, your donors will smell the rat and you'll lose credibility. Don't ever underestimate your donors' bullshit radar.

4. **MAKE IT SENSUAL:** There are only five ways in which we learn about the world around us – and connect with others in our human tribe. Our senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell are the only inputs that allow our minds, hearts and spirits to grow and thrive. Use them – and use them explicitly!

A surgeon describes the feeling of a beating heart in his hands. An aid worker describes the faint sound of a starving baby's cry as it soothes itself toward death. A cancer sufferer tells of how the smells from the hospice kitchen remind him of Sunday dinner at his grandma's house. You get the idea. We use vivid sensory descriptions whenever we can – because they work gangbusters at bringing stories to life.

5. **MAKE YOUR FACTS AND FIGURES EASY TO DIGEST:** A good rule to adopt is never to lead your persuasive argument with statistics and facts. As we've said earlier, the brain will use them to filter and process the gift decision – but rarely do numbers stimulate that giving impulse in the heart and soul.

When you do use numbers, try to be creative with them. For example, when I do Iceberg Philanthropy seminars, I tell participants that Canadians have left \$52 billion in their wills to charity. Do I think that humongous number means anything to the blank faces in the room? Nope. But when I go on to ask them to imagine \$20 bills stretched end to end from the earth to the moon and back – three times – their eyes open wide. They get it.

6. **THE CAUSE COMES FIRST – ALWAYS!** Let's get back in touch with reality for a minute. Your donor's reality, that is. Gary doesn't really give to your soup kitchen. He gives to the homeless. He doesn't give to your NGO. He gives to those refugees in Somalia. He doesn't give to your hospital foundation. He's giving to help your patients. Lose the cause and you'll lose your donor's attention.

Why not try our two-thirds one-third rule? In every bit of donor communications, from web content to thank you letters, use two-thirds of your words to talk about the cause. Then – and only then – use the remaining third to talk about your organization.

When you speak about the cause, you're speaking to Gary's heart and soul. The stuff about your organization is only going to his head. When you get really good at this simple approach, your donors are going to start getting really passionate about giving to you.

7. **EXPRESS YOUR BELIEFS:** Forget your mission and vision statements for a minute (isn't it surprising how many of them suck anyway?). Ask yourself – what do we believe in around here? I've worked with board and staff retreats where this simple question leads to hours of fantastic thinking, debating and aha moments. Your beliefs don't have to be as specific as your mission or be directly tied to your program.

I once was the volunteer president of a national disability association. At an annual board retreat one year, we went through the exercise of nailing down our beliefs. The first one turned out to be 'we believe that each and every child born into this world has the right to find his or her full human potential'. Belief statements are righteous and noble. When your donor sees her beliefs reflected in yours, she's going to bond to you – truly, madly, deeply.

8. **EXPLICIT PURPOSE & MEANING:** In his soul dimension, Gary gives because his philanthropy gives a sense of purpose and meaning to his life. (Remember, that 93% of donors say that helping others in need is 'an essential part of their being human'.)

Yet, I rarely see fundraisers talk about this. I'm pretty sure we all assume this is an unstated contract of sorts between us and our donors. So let's state it! Let's say it out loud and let's say it proud. Let's say how advancing our cause makes us feel more fully human. More fulfilled in our being. More satisfied in pursuing our true life's purpose.

Let me share one example of this. A couple of years ago, we were approached by an NGO who was interested in working with us. I went online to check them out and downloaded their annual report. Overall, I was impressed. Great layout. Wonderful photos. Great stories about projects – and the people whose lives had immeasurably been improved because of this NGO's presence in their lives.

But then there was the ubiquitous message from the Executive Director. Head and shoulders studio photo – and all this techno-speak about strategic plans, budget constraints, environmental challenges and program delivery. Nowhere did he tell me why he cared! Why he worked there. What his work means to him at a simple, human level. When people don't tell me why they do what they do, I'm always left feeling a bit like I've been taken for granted. That leaves me sceptical.

Always, always tell them who you are. And tell them why you're there. That makes you real. That makes you credible. That starts the deep human connection.



BUILDING BRIDGES

We all know it. And the academics – from sociologists to anthropologists to social psychologists – have proved it time and again.

We humans are social animals. We live through our connections with others. We wither and die alone. We need love. We need belonging. We need to express our thoughts and feelings to others. What are we as fundraisers if not bridge builders? We spend our professional lives building bridges between human need and donor aspirations.



My partners and I have been building bridges between donors and charities for decades. While the tactical means of connecting (there was no Twitter when I started out!) are constantly changing, the true human elements of great connecting are timeless.

3-D connecting doesn't only apply to Gary the donor. It applies in our lives. Every important relationship in our lives ebbs and flows among these three dimensions. Becoming mindful of these dimensions will make you a better friend, a better parent, a better lover – and yes, a much better fundraiser!



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