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Love Thy Reader | About Donor Communications | *from Tom Ahern*



If you had more money ... you *could* do more good.
If you do better communications ... you *will* have more money.

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"Showing" rather than "telling" the mission....

Ana's story

Lucky me: I get to see some pretty incredible annual reports. This "[gratitude report](#)" from [The Redwood](#), a haven from domestic abuse -- crafted by the incomparable [Agents of Good](#) -- is among the very, very best. Note: Ana is a real person, this is her real story in all its messy detail, and the use of photography is brilliant.

"Recommended by an expert" department....

We were talking about the online giving experience

I think Mazarine Treyz, [Wild Woman Fundraising](#), said the [Global Autism Project](#) website was pretty sweet, for its online giving experience.

From the "Now you know" department....

Talking about "bequests" cuts bequest giving in half

Pretty amazing [article](#) (well, my cup of tea, anyway) about how language and social norms influence the

Ahern presents where next?

Webinar: [money-making donor newsletters](#), Dec. 8, 2014
Tucson, AZ, [AFP monthly meeting](#), Jan. 9, 2015
FIA [conference, Brisbane](#), Australia, Feb. 18-20, 2015

Name the #1 distraction in fundraising?

Bosses, bless their hearts

Which approach raises the most funds: (1) a well-argued appeal that explains the problem and offers statistical proof; or (2) an emotional appeal that tells a sad story? In short, which is better: stories or statistics?

making of "planned gifts."
From Michael Rosen Says,
with a tip of the hat to [Greg Warner](#) for the lead!

Oh, this stunning thing....
For your sheer enjoyment
Remind yourself of this iconic [Rembrandt painting](#) first. Then watch this [amazing video](#) next. (Highly recommended by the also amazing [Rick Schwartz](#), the nation's top community foundation comms consultant; via the equally amazing Doris Donovan, our bestest theater buddy.)

From "Your 10th-grade English teacher was obscenely WRONG! in retrospect" department....
6 "rules" for online writing
Read [this](#), via [Future Fundraising Now](#).

From "Your mom, however, was right" department....
Why "because" by itself is a reason to give
"Just because!" Heard by children the world over. So here's an easy "trick" that will bring in lots more gifts: use the word "because" in your asks. Read this [superb explanation](#) of the science by the ever-fab Clairification blog.

There's always next year....
5 storytelling tips for Giving Tuesday, Dec. 2
And if you don't participate in "Giving Tuesday"? Doesn't matter. These are [good tips anyway](#), from guest blogger, Jenna Sauber at [CauseVox](#). See her #4, for instance. From the always excellent Nancy Schwartz, and her [Getting Attention!](#) blog.

What does TrueSense know....
5 ways to grow your email list
Director of Digital Strategy, Brian Tucker, wrote this precise and useful [article](#) based on his experience at

Answer: Stories

Let's get a little technical.

Here's Professor [Paul J. Zak](#) writing in the Harvard Business Review, in an Oct. 28, 2014 article titled "[Why Your Brain Loves Good Storytelling](#)":

"Many business people have already discovered the power of storytelling in a practical sense - they have observed how compelling a well-constructed narrative can be. But recent scientific work is putting a much finer point on just how stories change our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors....

"By taking blood draws before and after the narrative, we found that character-driven stories do consistently cause oxytocin synthesis." [Oxytocin is a neurochemical that motivates us to cooperate.]

"Further, the amount of oxytocin released by the brain predicted how much people were willing to help others; for example, donating money to a charity associated with the narrative."

Stories do that. Statistics don't.

The whole "statistics vs. stories" debate is pointless, according to the laboratory. And yet it's harder to kill than an urban myth. I guess because it all seems so obvious: "Some people like stories. Some people like numbers." Stories, numbers: even-steven.

But even-steven is not true.

Correctly, it should be stated: "ALL people like stories" - there's feel-good neurochemistry involved after all - "and a few people like numbers, too."

Storytelling - narrative, if you prefer a fancier name - is universal. It has been more important to human evolution than opposable thumbs, as Lisa Cron points out in her excellent book, [Wired for Story: The Writer's Guide to Using Brain Science to Hook Readers from the Very First Sentence](#).

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"Role model" alert...

Creating a great online giving experience

In my last issue, I described how a terrific charity lost my eager monthly gift when their Evil Robot suddenly intervened to turn my online giving experience cold as ice. Pam Grow of [Simple Development Systems](#) wrote to report, "I came across a small shop with seamless online giving." Pam is talking about [Brittany's Hope](#). So there you go: a GOOD role model to study. Make a small gift and see how it works.

For your contemplation....

News at 11: Some emails are making LOTS of \$\$\$\$

What makes a winning email? See for yourself. [Fundraising Success magazine](#) has released its 2014 Gold Award winners, for bringing in baskets of cash. Go [here](#) to see what winning looks like. My take-away? You need loads of email addresses ... but the ROI is unbeatable. It cost the winner, [Guide Dogs for the Blind](#), \$500 (one assumes that considers indirect as well as direct costs; staff time IS an expense) to generate \$25,732 in gifts.

Arts orgs...

How your boss's ego kills your fundraising

Thanks to [Mary Cahalane](#) for the lead. Thanks to Jeff Brooks for following up the lead on his essential [Future Fundraising Now](#) blog. But you know what? It's not just the [arts](#) that get side-swiped by ED's egos. Complacent egos, little training? Too common for comment. Fundraising only LOOKS easy. It's not.

Story: it is how we learn most of what we know. It is how we trigger empathy (and gifts) in others.

And yet....

November 13, 2014. I'm speaking in Huntsville, Alabama, to the AFP chapter.

It's National Philanthropy Day. Lunch has been served. [Jay Dryden](#) - a Tennessee Valley philanthropist with the right stuff - has accepted an award. Now for dessert the audience gets to endure me for 2.5 hours.

I'm rattling along like a loose muffler about stories and their importance in fundraising communications.

We all admire a famous six-word "novel." Hemingway purportedly wrote it to win a bet. "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." It's been made into a dozen movies, in every culture.



We talk about [Seth Godin's](#) profound idea that when someone makes a gift to charity, that person is composing a story - a very personal, very meaningful story where she's doing good, where she's contributing to society, where she's doing something that makes her love herself a little more. Charity is good for the soul. Charity is good for the complexion. Charity is good for your self-esteem.

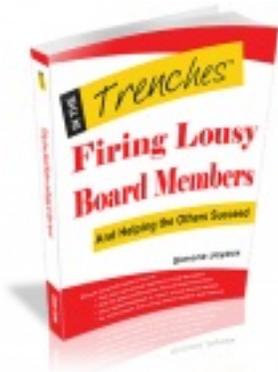
A hand pops up, attached to a mid-30s fundraiser. "Question?"

Of course.

She's frowning slightly. I've seen this expression before. Often. I know what's coming. It comes up pretty much every time I speak to fundraisers.

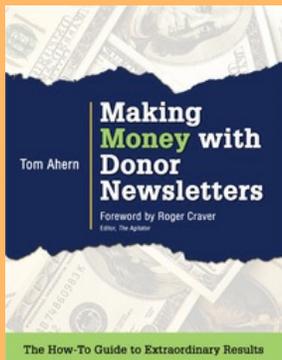
"Do you have any advice?" she starts. "I *want* to tell stories. But my boss insists we talk about the agency's statistics. He is very firm. He says people need to know the numbers before they'll invest in us. What can I do to

Better Boards Await You



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Make More Money



Heavily revised and illustrated 2nd edition. From [Emerson & Church](#).

When can I see you again? **I'm around, speaking** [Calendar](#) of upcoming Ahern workshops. For an occasionally entertaining downloadable PDF of workshops I currently offer, [CLICK ME](#).

Ahern [website](#)

Working on.... Got me another big audit upcoming and a case for Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. Getting ready for Australia

change his mind?"

On bleak days I've muttered, "Nothing. Get a different boss. And next time? One not utterly unaware of sales and modern neuroscience."

The art of managing up

But I'm not feeling bleak.

Just last week at the inaugural (& totally awesome) [Nonprofit Storytelling Conference](#) in Seattle I heard Peter Drury of [Splash.org](#), a shockingly impactful clean-water charity, talk at length about "managing up."



As I understand him, you're responsible for "educating" those above you, the ones who hold approval power.

In Peter's view (& mine), it's a key part of the fundraiser's (or any communicator's) job: **managing up**.

I saw instantly: *Peter is SO right. I do this all the time; I've done it for years, in fact.* Because -- yoo-hoo, fundraisers -- I've smashed my classic Roman nose against the same brick walls you do.

The e-newsletter you're reading at this very moment, honestly?

It's just a grand "managing up" enterprise, meant to condition an entire industry (or at least the 9,000-plus in that industry who subscribe) to a different, **more lucrative**, way of doing donor communications.

Futile? Sometimes.

But you gotta try. And sometimes managing up works beyond your wildest....

One small triumph for FR kind

Last year, I needed to convince a review panel of world-

to ur.

France [website](#)

"Stop!"

The Little Words Mean the Most...

My stupid [blog](#). Includes "Worksheet Confidential," a gappy documentary of my work methods.

Joinme?

¶ [Lkdln](#): 1,208 connections

¶ [Twitter](#): 1,863 followers

Handle: thattomahern

¶ [E-news](#): 9,123 subscribers

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Could they take the heat? Well, they came into my kitchen...

Enter a **GALLERY** of **FRANK critiques ... solely for your error-avoiding, idea-stealing pleasure**

Brave people sent me samples of their donor comms, for a **free, nitty-gritty** - and **public** - critique. Find out exactly what they did wrong or right, and learn from their mistakes or victories.

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class scientists to adopt the theme of "good vs. evil" for their campaign case.

I managed up.

For these heavy thinkers, I wrote a 4,632-word footnoted briefing paper explaining in detail the target audience ([Ultra High Net Worth Individuals](#));

>> what key informant interviews with top people had revealed about our messaging prospects, positive and negative;

>> the four-part narrative structure I recommended we adopt and why it worked;

>> why "complexity kills the cat in fundraising" ... **and a lot more** (lord, I flailed on).

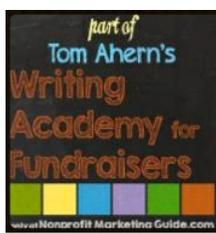
Given this closely-argued, well-sourced, unemotional briefing, my scientist reviewers not only accepted "good vs. evil" as the campaign theme, they pushed me **to go even further** than I'd dared.

So, yeah, you can change the minds of reasonable people. It just takes some 'splaining.



This article was adapted from my new book-in-progress, **Donor Communications 101: The Test**. *For boards, bosses, and fundraisers: to promote a common understanding of profitable best practices in appeals, newsletters, and thanks; both printed and digital.* To be published by [Charity Channel Press](#).

Back issues of this newsletter? [Here...](#)



**Donor Newsletters That
Raise More Money**
featuring Tom Ahern
December 8th through December 16th

FYI, below: a sample of unedited questions, asked and answered, that came up LAST TIME inside our exclusive, attendees-only Facebook group. Facebook plays a critical role in DONOR NEWSLETTERS THAT RAISE MORE MONEY webinars and coaching. It's where YOU talk.

"Dear Tom: could you recommend a book on reclaiming lapsed donors? How about a nice e-clinic? Please? Pretty please? PLEASE?!!!"

"Dear Tom: could you recommend a really good church bulletin to look at and imitate? Our parish wants to start a newsletter...."

"Tom: you mentioned that a story has to start so we feel empathy. I'm sure I'll be able to recognize it when I see it, but not sure I know exactly how to go about writing for it. Could you give some tips? Thank you!"

"Tom: What do you think about putting a message on the donor newsletter reply envelope that says...."

"Tom: If people only read the headlines/big text, how do we tell an emotional story? In the hospital setting, it's a bit unsettling to show some of the 'before' pictures or images of patients while in the hospital to really illustrate the 'after'/success part of the story."

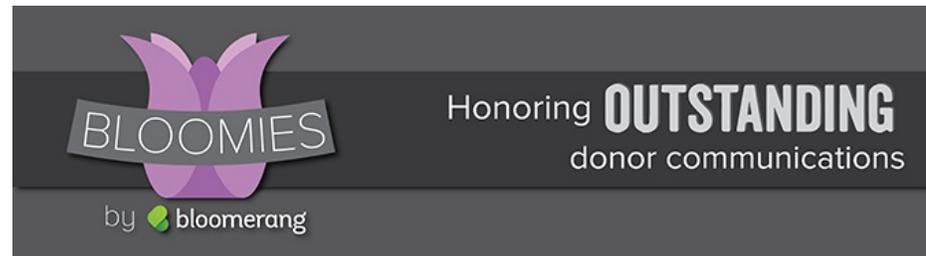
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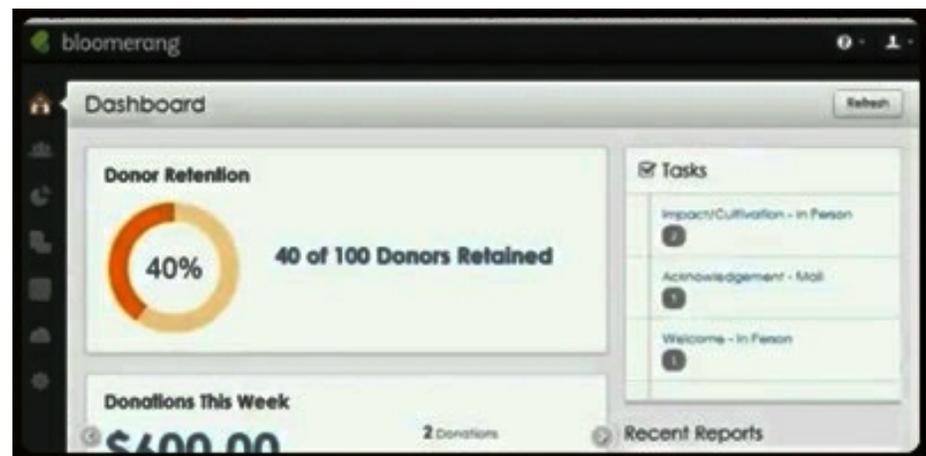
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Built to be so simple and intuitive you don't even need a

manual. And yet ... built to give you unprecedented insight into your donor data, in the office or on your mobile. Retention expert Dr. Adrian Sargeant is a key member of the Bloomerang team, so you know the thinking behind it is state of the art. Are you willing to invest 30 minutes in something that could change the future of your nonprofit? Then watch Bloomerang's "[how it works](#)" [video](#).

[2014 Dear Santa Donor-Comm Ts](#)



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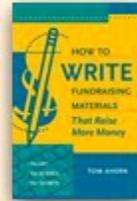
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'Til next time...
donor communications
true believers!

