



Workshop resource - Free gifts and supporter journeys

In this fictional dialogue we explore some of the questions that we've frequently encountered from fundraisers who experience pressure to deliver on their short-term fundraising targets.

Fundraiser:

I get this stuff about the longer-term advantages of appealing to intrinsic values. But surely the most important thing is to get people interested and engaged? Once you've done that, you have the opportunity to take them on a journey. If extrinsic values are more persuasive at the point of engagement, surely it is best to use these? Then, once people are signed up, that journey can orient them towards more intrinsic values.

Tom:

Okay, but the first assumption here is that extrinsic values will prove to be more effective in engaging some audiences. We've not found evidence for this – indeed in our studies, we've found that intrinsic values are significantly more effective in leading participants to express concern, even where these participants place particular importance on extrinsic values.

Fundraiser:

That may be true in many cases. But in your experiments you've not tested giving participants a material reward – something like cheaper access to a visitor attraction, or a free gift – in return for their support, have you? You've tended to highlight more general extrinsic incentives – such as broad economic benefits. My hunch is that a material reward would often prove to be more effective than intrinsic appeals in encouraging people to offer financial support.

Netta:

You're right, we haven't tested this. We can see that, assessed purely in terms of encouraging people to support a charity, rewards of this type are likely to be effective – particularly if these rewards have significant value. But in using these rewards you are inviting people to engage as consumers rather than as donors. Giving a customer 'money off', or throwing in a free gift, seems to be an effective way of selling products. But people who are marketing products aren't usually concerned about the effects of their tactics on people's wider social or environmental concern. As a fundraiser you can't be oblivious to these wider impacts.



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Fundraiser:

So you're saying that what may be an effective way of recruiting supporters – by offering a reward – could undermine these people's longer term commitment to support the aims of my charity?

Netta:

Yes.

Fundraiser:

Okay, but suppose that having recruited supporters – using whatever tactics work best – we then gradually engage them through a more intrinsic set of communications? We can take them on a journey that leads them towards more intrinsic values!

Netta:

This could work as you suggest. But research suggests that initial engagement through extrinsic values will make subsequent engagement through intrinsic values more difficult, because you will have invited the donor to think of their relationship with the charity as transactional. So there's a trade-off.

Tom:

But we have some other concerns about the 'take them on a journey' strategy.

Fundraiser:

Oh, I thought you might...

Tom:

Taken together, these concerns leave us feeling that charities should be very cautious in using extrinsic messages of any kind, even if only to 'hook people in'.



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Fundraiser:

What are these concerns?

Tom

Well, firstly, we're concerned that in this conversation we're focusing narrowly on the effects of a communication on a donor – on the people who actually embark on the journey. But what about the effects of your communications on people who see your fundraising campaigns in newspapers, on the TV or internet, or on billboards, but who are not moved to donate?

Fundraiser:

Unfortunately, that's an awful lot of people!

Tom:

Yes! Do the impacts that your campaigns have on these people matter to you?

Fundraiser:

Well, not really, to be honest. At least, they don't matter to me when I'm wearing my fundraiser's hat...

Netta:

Here the likely negative impacts (from a values perspective) aren't off-set by the possibility of taking these people on your journey. You've subtly invited all these people to re-frame their concern about your cause as consumers, rather than as concerned citizens. That's perhaps not going to seem to be too damaging for you while you're wearing that fundraising hat. But it'll matter to you if you're interested in building wider concern about your cause. These are people who have seen your marketing communications, but who haven't donated to you, haven't invited further contact, and are not going to be coming on any journeys with you. That's not good.



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Fundraiser:

Hmm. I'm not convinced that this matters to be honest. Even if I take my fundraising hat off for a moment, these aren't people who are particularly concerned about the issues on which my charity works. If they were bothered, they'd be likely to donate. If they don't donate, they're probably not bothered; and if they're not bothered, are they really relevant?

Tom:

In a world where we need to build far wider concern about a range of social and environmental issues, it seems short-sighted – if not downright reckless – to write off vast swathes of people because they don't respond to an invitation to donate to your charity!

Fundraiser:

You had another concern about my strategy of taking supporters on a journey?

Tom:

Oh yes. We're not convinced that charities are as careful as they should be about ensuring that this journey is actually there to be taken! We'd be the first to admit that we have too little data on this. Nonetheless, we have compared communications made by conservation charities and aimed at mass audiences with communications made by the same charities but aimed at existing supporters. If the 'take them on a journey' strategy is being deployed, we'd anticipate that communications aimed at existing supporters would reflect more intrinsic messages than communications aimed at the general public, right?

Fundraiser:

Yes, you would. What did you find?



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Netta:

We found that communications aimed at members and supporters were significantly higher in some extrinsic values (specifically, the 'power' group) and that communications aimed at the general public were significantly higher in some intrinsic values (specifically, the 'self-direction' group). This is the reverse of what we'd expect if communications for members and supporters were tailored to better engage intrinsic values. In the case of these organisations, at least, it didn't seem that supporters were being taken on a journey that led to increased engagement of intrinsic values. If anything, this was a journey headed in the opposite direction.

Fundraiser:

So whatever values we use to recruit new supporters, we would do well to make sure that this journey is there to be made: that we talk to supporters about our cause in a way which connects more strongly with intrinsic values?

Tom:

Absolutely. We've argued for reducing appeals to extrinsic values – even at the point of recruitment. But we understand that this will take time. As you work towards that, you could at least re-double your efforts to engage existing supporters through more intrinsic values!

Discussion questions

- Do you think your charity draws on different values in communicating with the general public (or prospective supporters) to those upon which it draws in the course of communicating with established supporters? If so, how do these differ?
- Does your charity seek to 'take new supporters on a journey'? This may be a journey aimed at deepening their understanding of the issues upon which you work, or broadening their concern. What do you think this journey entails in terms of the values that your charity uses in communicating with supporters?