

## Breaking Good Habits: Writing Effective Donor Letters

Madison Nonprofit Day 2010

Dear John, please send money— Excellent donor writing can make the difference between engagement and the recycling bin. Capture more readers for your mission by learning writing techniques for today's donors.

**At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify at least three reasons fund raising letters are often ineffective,
2. Justify breaking a few “rules” of grammar,
3. Explain how to use the layout of a letter to capture attention, and
4. Write a more effective, donor-centered fund raising letter to improve donor response.

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## Common Problems in Nonprofit Writing

PROBLEM	NOTES / SOLUTIONS
<p><b>Too organization- or “me-” focused.</b></p> <p><i>We are great. We did this. Give us \$.</i></p>	
<p><b>Too vague.</b></p> <p><i>Your gift will help very much.</i></p>	
<p><b>Too intelligential.</b></p> <p><i>Privation exacerbates co-morbidities.</i></p>	
<p><b>Lacking confidence.</b></p> <p><i>Any amount you can give is appreciated.</i></p>	
<p><b>Multiple asks.</b></p> <p><i>Please give this AND ...</i></p>	
<p><b>Mistakes in grammar distract from important messages.</b></p> <p><i>Slopy werds = sloppy nonprofit</i></p>	
<p><b>Content must inform readers in a quick and engaging way.</b></p> <p><i>Blah, blah, blah. What’s the point?</i></p>	

## Favorite Resources

### Fund Raising and Marketing

- Andresen, K. (2006). *Robin Hood Marketing: Stealing Corporate Savvy to Sell Just Causes*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- ★ Brooks, J. (2010). *Future Fund Raising Now* [BLOG]. Available online at: <http://bit.ly/aIRTLm>.
- ★ Davenport, C. (2010). *Movie Mondays For Nonprofits*. Available online at: <http://bit.ly/bRQSX2>.
- Frank, J. R. (1996). *The Ministry of Development: An Introduction to the Strategies for Success in Christian Ministries*. Dallas: EDM Press.
- Grace, K. S. (2005). *Beyond Fundraising: New Strategies for Nonprofit Innovation and Investment* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Greenfield, J. M. (2002). *Fundraising Fundamentals: A Guide to Annual Giving for Professionals and Volunteers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Prince, R. A. & File, K. M. (1994). *The Seven Faces of Philanthropy: A New Approach to Cultivating Major Donors*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tempel, E. R. (2003). *Hank Rosso's Achieving Excellence in Fund Raising* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- ★ Warwick, M. (2001). *How to Write Successful Fundraising Letters*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Williams, K. A. (2004). *Donor Focused Strategies for Annual Giving*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

### Organization Development

- Bolman, L. G. & Deal, T. E. (2003). *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Leap and Others Don't*. New York: Harper.
- Collins, J. (2005). *Good to Great and Social Sectors: Why Business Thinking is Not the Answer*. Monograph.
- Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (2008). *The Leadership Challenge* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lencioni, P. (2002). *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: a Leadership Fable*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of a Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday.

### Governance

- Andringa, R. C., & Engstrom, T. W. (2007). *Nonprofit Board Answer Book: Practical Guidelines for Board Members and Chief Executives* (2nd ed.). Washington, D.C.: BoardSource.
- Chait, R. P., Holland, T. P., & Taylor, B. E. (1996). *Improving the Performance of Governing Boards*. Phoenix: Oryx Press.
- Chait, R. P., Ryan, W.P., & Taylor, B.E. (2005). *Governance as Leadership*. Washington, D.C.: BoardSource.
- Hafele, B.A. (2008). *New Board Member Integration: Orientation for Success*. Unpublished master's capstone, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. Available by request from the author.
- Houle, C. O. (1989). *Governing Boards: Their Nature and Nurture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. – This is a must-have book for anyone who wants to learn the essentials of governance.
- Taylor, B., Chait, R., & Holland, T. (1996, September). The New Work of the Nonprofit Board. *Harvard Business Review*, 74(5), 36-46.

## Notes

