



# COUNSEL & CAPITAL

*Investing in Christendom*

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## Reaching the Left-Brain Donor

Randon Samelson

*By moving beyond traditional, emotional approaches to fundraising, non-profit organizations can tap a huge new base of support.*

"A RECENT SURVEY of non-profit organizations conducted by Johns Hopkins University found that 86 percent of non-profits "worried about finances, ...with 51 percent describing their worries as very severe or severe." The overwhelming majority of non-profits feel anxious for dollars and donors, to expand their vision or merely to survive. And since ministries are staffed with sensitive people drawn to compassionate outreach, it's not surprising that ministries present their case in emotional terms. Vivid pictures of children scavenging for food in garbage dumps, gaunt victims of Africa's AIDS epidemic, Third-World babies suffering from congenital defects, or persecuted house-church members in China-these emotional appeals have proven to soften hearts and motivate donors.

When the traditional, emotional approach fails to generate sufficient response, non-profits often do the following: a) change the development officer or fundraising consultant, b) mail more appeal letters, c) buy new lists, d) emphasize a hot geographical area, e) substitute different photographs, or f) capitalize on the latest natural disaster. Adjusting these variables, while not inappropriate, doesn't find long-term solutions.

The problem with presenting fund-raising entreaties in emotional terms, no matter how well that's done, is that it fails to maximize financial results. It does not motivate or serve a large class of potential donors. The time has come for non-profits to consider not just the hearts, but the minds of potential donors, appealing to their ability not just to feel but to think. Though emotions are a great driving force, William Ross said, "Probably one of the most important lessons man has to learn is how to guide by his reason the great driving force of his emotions." By moving beyond the traditional, emotional approach to fundraising, non-profit organizations can reach the most overlooked and underserved donor in ministry fundraising: the left-brain donor.

## Understanding the Left-Brain Donor

The left-brain donor feels motivated by ministries' missions but takes an analytical, left-brain approach to giving. In the late 1960s, Nobel-Prize-winning psychobiologist Roger W. Sperry theorized that the brain's two hemispheres have different methods of thinking. The right brain is largely intuitive and the left-brain is largely analytical and sequential. In each person, one side dominates, affecting how he or she processes information and responds.

Similarly, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the most-utilized personality test, identifies "thinking-dominant" and "feeling-dominant" individuals. The MBTI suggests that approximately 50 percent of the population belongs to each of the two types. Thus, the thinking-dominant donor, or left-brain donor, represents 50 percent of the population. And this donor fills an overwhelming majority of the world's leadership positions and thus, holds significant assets or income. That's because left-brain-dominant people move toward professions rewarding their approach and often become bankers, physicians, scientists, lawyers, accountants, business executives, and operating officers.

The problem for non-profits now becomes clear: typical fundraising appeals are emotion-based, but these do not capture the attention of left-brain donors, who constitute 50 percent of the population and hold the vast majority of assets.

Left-brain donors desire to be disciplined in fulfilling their stewardship responsibilities. Thus, they think through factual information to logically determine the recipients of their giving. Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen, the authors of *Type Talk at Work*, describe this approach: "It's not that people and human values become unimportant (to a thinker), but more often than not they are trumped by the desire to be... competent and to remain objective." While pictures of a starving child arouse compassion, the left-brain donor's evaluation focuses not solely on the child's need but also on the ministry's effectiveness in meeting that need. When the information their minds require is not forthcoming through conventional approaches to fundraising, left-brain donors, in frustration, may make a token gift and withdraw rather than fulfill the stewardship responsibilities of which they're capable.

John D. Rockefeller, patriarch of the Rockefeller family, may have been such a donor. While amassing great wealth, he battled competitors and trust-busters intent on dismantling his life's work. However, neither of these opponents caused him as much distress as did his sense of philanthropic duty. Historians suggest that the nervous breakdown Rockefeller suffered was due to the difficulties he faced trying to accomplish his philanthropic responsibilities. While token givers may be labeled selfish, many, like Rockefeller, desperately want to give generously to humanity. Andrew Carnegie expressed this goal when he said, "The man who dies rich dies disgraced." But business leaders like Rockefeller and Carnegie, who have made their money with one set of disciplines, can hardly be expected to ignore those disciplines when they give. The obstacle to their giving may lie in the approach taken by charities.

A businessman friend nearly ceased giving to a ministry that did not provide factual information but instead told emotional stories of children. My friend was polite but reduced his giving to a trickle. Unfortunately for that ministry, he did not tell them what was missing. Instead, he approached a different organization, one skilled in providing information about non-profits in a user-friendly format for analytical thinkers. He asked about the child-serving ministry he had been supporting, and when he received the data he needed, my friend surprised the original ministry with a multi-million-dollar gift. The ministry was able to expand its service to children, simply because the needs of this left-brain donor were finally met.

The Bible does not disdain but in fact supports the decision-making process of the left-brain donor. In the Parable of the Talents in Luke 19, the stewards were required to provide an accurate accounting of their management choices and outcomes. Decisions to entrust additional funds to each person were determined by evidence of active and wise stewardship. Further, the Bible teaches that the Christian community is like the human body: it does not consist of one part but many. "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts ... different ways of serving... (and) different abilities to perform service" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). People possess different gifts, see with different perspectives, and decide with different criteria. Donors likewise have different gifts, perspectives, and criteria. Thus, non-profits should not restrict themselves to emotional appeals, when analytical ones will reach the additional and important left-brain donor.

## **Motivating the Left-Brain Donor**

To improve communication with a left-brain donor, provide factual data. Analytic thinkers appreciate learning about the non-profit's goals, plans, and strategies. They want to see trends in revenues and expenses and need honest disclosure of both successes and failures. The left-brain donor needs numbers, not adjectives, so provide a statistical summary, a separate document with graphs and hard data that supplement an annual report. For example, Goodwill Industries, the large non-profit organization, produces an excellent statistical summary of their activity.

In addition, be succinct. Long-winded fundraisers can lose a left-brain audience quickly. An international investor, a left-brain donor, told me, "You can have three minutes of my time, either listening or reading, to explain what your company is doing and why." He believed that if we could not communicate the essence of our mission and vision in three minutes, we lacked discipline and focus.

Another way to connect with the left-brain donor is to write an annual letter, written as if to your father whose business you have been running for the past year while he has been unavailable. A year is a significant period, one that warrants careful reporting so the "owner" can study and review the information. Warren Buffett, one of the greatest investors of all times, writes an annual letter "... to attract

and knit together a shareholder group who would behave like his partners—in other words, who would stick with him." That sense of community, which ministries crave with their donors, may increase long-term donations and stability.

## **Costs of Reaching the Left-Brain Donor**

The direct cost of connecting with the left-brain donor is minimal. The staff must spend time organizing information, and the CEO must write a more complete annual letter. The real cost is indirect: the courage to be transparent. No organization likes talking about its failures or problems. Few people enjoy publishing their goals and later reporting where they have fallen short. But organizations that find the courage to present their situation honestly are more likely to reach the left-brain donor. Henry Ford said that "Failure is only the opportunity to begin again more intelligently," and no one appreciates that reality more than an analytical thinker.

These costs of communicating with the left-brain donor are far outweighed by the benefits. Products created to serve the left-brain donor bring an increased clarity and focus that help ministries become more effective. Further, by communicating with the left-brain donor, a non-profit can serve a broader range of donors and create greater connectedness and confidence. Finally, by communicating with the left-brain donor, a non-profit opens the strong possibility of finding additional funds and support. A passionate appeal to the heart of a donor will always have a place in fundraising—probably the central place. However, by providing information useful to left-brain donors, non-profits may tap huge new benefits.

The choice is simple: search for more revenues along the traditional, emotional path, or make an additional commitment to serve the analytical, left-brain donor. The challenge to non-profit organizations is this: What do you have to lose?"

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