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**PERSONAL
FUNDRAISING
POWER**

OF
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Influencing Donors



**Bright
Spot**

The Members Club

WHAT TO SAY FIRST

What to say first

When it's your turn to talk, what do you say first?

The context in which we consider an issue makes all the difference to how we respond to any information about how it might be solved.

The biggest mistake made by most fundraisers is to talk about what the charity does without any attempt to 'set the frame'. We have to help the donor tune into a problem they care about, before going into any detail about our solution / the fact that our charity can solve this problem. If, as most fundraisers do when talking to donors, we talk primarily about what our charity does (eg the helpline, the research, the scholarships), they may appear to be interested, but they are unlikely to decide to give.

Just as weight loss adverts usually present a 'before' picture as well as an 'after' picture, it is essential in fundraising to help someone connect to the problem faced by the refugees / patients / students etc that our charity helps.

Within The Magic Formula, there are three key questions which help to do this:

A. What, put most simply, is the problem that our service / project was set up to solve, and what are the consequences of the problem

It's very important that you're able to clearly state the reason why something needs to be done. Eg:

- Too many people discover the signs of cancer developing very late, which dramatically harms their chances of survival and often increases the severity of the treatment they will need.
- Many teenagers with arthritis do not manage to stick to the full course of drugs to manage their condition, and the consequence of this is that their condition gets much worse

Note, all of these statements could include a statistic. And clearly you should know that number, because some listeners will ask you to tell them the scale of the problem. When they ask, be able to tell them. But I recommend that you should not include the large numbers when persuading people in conversation, because without context such numbers are rarely meaningful or persuasive. Knowing that a bad thing happens to 15,000 people is unlikely to motivate her more than knowing it happens to 10,000.

Instead, I advise that you use this question to help someone gain insight into the precise nature of the problem, ie you're saying that 'finding symptoms too late' is the thing which deserves our attention, not necessarily the scale.

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A key way to lessen the impact of what you say is to inadvertently soften it with euphemisms. For example, fundraisers at some medical charities I have worked with initially talked about 'social isolation' as being a key part of the problem that their services are designed to help reduce. The objective tone of the phrase social isolation may have some benefit for a social worker who needs to calmly create a strategy to help her patients. But for a fundraiser whose goal is to help a potential donor connect with why they might care, to talk about 'the social isolation' is to do a disservice to the donor.

What do we actually mean? What we're actually talking about is 'terrible loneliness' or even 'they feel cut off from or sometimes even shunned by former colleagues, friends or family'. My point here is that the words you choose affect how both you and the other person will feel. Our goal is to two-fold - to help someone be absolutely clear about what the problem is and to help them care about that problem.

Think of an important service, project or area of research that your charity provides. Now answer this question:



What is the essence of the problem (that your charity solves) and what are the consequences of this problem?

B. What is not obvious about this problem?

What might some people not be aware of / or at least not be focussing on, as to why this can be a problem?

Pointing out these other issues help us see it differently. Once we see it differently, we might not only care more, we're also more likely to see beyond the depressing statistic and look at it as an interesting problem worthy of a solution. For example:

- Very few people know the early warning signs that a tumour might be developing, and even if they do, few make time to regularly check because they presume it won't happen to them.
- Most of the diseases that kill children in the developing world are not rare and difficult to treat; in fact, they are entirely preventable.
- Many people are unaware that 'breast cancer' is not just one disease, but at least 20 different diseases.
- On many occasions that babies get harmed by a parent, the parent had not set out to commit an evil act that day. Often combinations of tiredness, stress and lack of understanding are the strongest causes of these tragedies.

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For the service, project or research you are thinking about, what is not obvious about this problem? Search for three or four things which many people may not have realised or focussed on when they hear about this issue.

C. What specific story or example sums up this problem?

The most important thing here is to think very broadly about what you think of when you hear the word story. Every time I do workshops on this topic, some fundraisers tell me they don't know many stories about their topic. What they usually mean is they don't know many case studies. Your own experience (chats with your friends and family / your travels / books and newspapers you've read etc) usually throw up plenty of very powerful content for helping you and others understand the problem more deeply.

But you have to choose to spend time to search your brain(s) for these nuggets of gold, and thinking can feel like hard work. It does not matter that they don't necessarily hang together with a perfect beginning, middle and end. They add a tangibility (and because they're yours, a credibility) to whatever you say about the problem faced by your beneficiaries. For example:

- One really bright physics student I know of wasn't able to keep up with all of his coursework because to survive he had to do part time jobs seven nights a week. He was always playing catch up and overwhelmed by his coursework and so he dropped out altogether.
- One fundraiser who even works for a breast cancer charity told me the reason she sometimes doesn't get around to checking is that deep down she assumes this will never happen to her.
- I heard about one girl who is 8 years old now who was violently shaken by her carer when she was 3 months old. She's been disabled ever since and still has to be fed and dressed by her mum.

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For the service, project or area of research you are thinking about, find examples of someone who suffers from this problem. (The sad truth is, assuming your charity solves a problem that needs solving, there are plenty of these examples out there in the world. The question is, can you find them? Or, if you can't initially think of an example, who could you talk to / where could you research to find these examples.)

You've been working on:

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