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**PERSONAL
FUNDRAISING
POWER**

OF
17

Influencing Donors



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THE AUTHORITY PRINCIPLE

The Authority Principle:

Three powerful tactics few fundraisers truly understand

In **Influence, the psychology of persuasion**, Robert Cialdini categorises the fifth principle of influence as Authority.

In 1955, researchers in Texas arranged for a 31 year old man to cross a street against a red light and into traffic. Sometimes he was dressed in a suit and tie, and sometimes wore less formal clothing. They discovered that when he was dressed in smart business clothes, more than three times as many pedestrians followed him into the traffic.

In numerous experiments like the one described above, he shows that the signals we pick up from who is giving us a particular message make a big difference to whether or not we are persuaded to act. I have found that very successful fundraisers make use of all of Cialdini's principles, but one of the key ones within my Magic Formula for helping donors connect to the difference your charity makes is Authority.

1 Expert framing. Cialdini demonstrates that when we are told something by an expert, such as a university professor, medical doctor or judge, we are more likely to be swayed by what they say. If you have used Wikipedia you may remember reading a message from the site's founder, Jimi Wales, asking for a donation. In tests, Wikipedia found that when the request came from Jimi, more people donated.

For example, when describing their innovative Skylight Centres, the UK charity Crisis has found it helpful to mention that the Centres' effectiveness has been independently evaluated by the University of York's Centre for Housing Policy.



Which authority figure or expert organisation could you secure a quote from to help people understand just how good your charity's service is?

I've found that though many charities do have endorsing quotes from relevant experts, hidden away in their materials, very few fundraisers are able to proactively include these endorsements in how they explain the power of their services to donors when in conversation.

Among your existing materials, there are likely to be some endorsing quotes from authority figures. Some are likely to far more relevant and powerful to the field your charity works in than others.

Which are they and how could you use them in the way you frame the quality of your services informal conversations with (potential) donors.

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2 Apply for and proactively mention awards. There is a reason why movie promoters tell you that the star of their new film is an ‘academy award-winner’. Incredibly quickly it sends a signal to your subconscious that these stars are critically acclaimed.

The truth is, applying for charity or fundraising awards is time consuming, and most would not bother if only doing it for a bit of glory.

It’s worth noting that not all of them won the award in question, but even those who didn’t have discovered that just being short-listed enabled them to frame their charity more powerfully (just as film promoters make full use of the claim ‘academy award-nominated’ frame to reassure us about a film’s quality).



What award has your charity ever won that you could make more use of in describing your services or partnerships? What award could you apply for now, that will in future help you secure meetings, influence donors or win partnerships?

3 Make use of trappings. Research shows that when professionals wear ‘badges of authority’ (like a doctor’s stethoscope), it affects how credible we perceive the wearer’s advice to be.

Recently I phoned Wateraid and while on hold I enjoyed listening to the sound of African singing, presumably in celebration of the clean water they are enjoying. I know that some UNICEF fundraisers take small packets of re-hydration salts to meetings; and a Breast Cancer Care fundraiser who always keeps in her bag ready for donor meetings, a copy of the excellent Mummy’s Lump, a book to help children understand what their mum may be going through when diagnosed with breast cancer.

Obviously props like these serve as ways to demonstrate impact, but they are also what Cialdini would call ‘trappings of authority’ because they help position you / your organisation as an expert.



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How could you signal to the other person's subconscious that you represent expertise? What prop or demonstration of your work could you take with you, other than simply a brochure?

You've been working on:

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