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**PERSONAL
FUNDRAISING
POWER**

OF
17

Influencing Donors



**Bright
Spot**

The Members Club

SOCIAL PROOF

Social Proof

Are the chances that we will give to a street musician increased when we see someone else giving to that musician? In one experiment to explore this idea, an accomplice of the researcher walked in front of passers-by putting money in the hat.

Most people I describe this research to predict that it would increase the number of people who give. But most are surprised at just how powerful the effect turns out to be. In an experiment described by Professor Robert Cialdini, in his excellent book *Influence*, it turned out that the number of people now giving money increased by eight times.

The most important thing I've discovered about this phenomenon of social proof is that nearly everyone under-estimates how powerful it is. Though we are aware that companies tend to collect testimonials from happy customers for their marketing materials, because we don't believe ourselves to be swayed by such things, we do not take rigorous action to find and use the social proof examples that would prove so helpful in our fundraising.

To increase the amount of money we raise, WE MUST BE PROACTIVE about the way we use real examples of other people who have done the thing that you would like your colleague or donor to do.

When I started out in fundraising, the main ways I tried to get better at my job were through common sense. For example I would try to better understand the donor and I would tell them things that they might care about to do with our cause. And I'm not saying that these fundamentals are not important, because clearly they are very important.

But it did not occur to me then to proactively mention other trusts / companies / donors as a way to help the person want to take action.

The phenomenon of bystander apathy on a busy street shows that actually social proof is affecting decision-making all the time, whether we like it or not. This is also true in fundraising situations. If you do not include examples of others who support your charity, they are likely to assume this is not the sort of thing that people like themselves do.

The Nudge Unit, attached to the UK Cabinet Office, conducted a study of payroll giving in a bank. They were interested to see what factors would increase someone's willingness to sign up. They found that when employees received an email from a colleague already supporting the charity, people were far more likely to sign up than when the email came from the charity.

If you take the trouble to find and include real relevant examples in your communication, you help people realise that giving to your charity is normal.

Find example(s) of someone like them - relevance is king

In a study by Professor Adrian Sargent, telephone fundraisers included examples of other people who had given, when talking to people who called to make a pledge. When they mentioned a (real) example of someone else who had been generous who was from the same state as the current caller that, this made the biggest difference in the social proof effect on that caller's gift. Where we live is only one factor in the identity we have for ourselves. Using examples of someone who your donor will feel is in some way like themselves (eg geography; in kind of work; hobby; values; wealth level etc) is the most important thing to be aware of.

Five ways you can harness the power of social proof:

1 Say who else has given / likes a particular aspect of your service. Deliberately pay attention to the names of other donors / trusts / companies who have supported your charity and be able to include these names to the potential funder you are currently talking to. Clearly some donors may not want you to mention their names publicly, but this should not be a barrier for the corporate and trust donors who support you. And some of your major donors would be only too happy for you to mention the good they are doing, as long as you check with them first.

Think of your next meeting with a partner / funder / donor. How could you use social proof, in what you say; or what is in your written proposal; or if they are coming to visit your charity, is there a particular room that was donor-funded or a donor recognition wall that would helpfully frame your conversation?

2 Frame how much people can give. Include examples of other supporters who have given at a certain level, and make sure this level matches what your current donor would potentially give.

Think of a donor / funder you are currently building a relationship with. Is there a particular gift level you think be right for them in due course, and if so, which other donors would be helpful to mention as the relationship progresses towards this point?

3 Systematically find connections to better understand trust and foundations opportunities. Draw up lists of the trustees at trusts you'd like to apply to, and ask any of your supporters who know lots of people whether they know any of those people, and whether they'd be willing to introduce you or find out more about the trust criteria on behalf of your charity. How could you make this process more systematic in your charity?

4 Find the bright spot when you need to influence colleagues. To generate more fundraising income you usually need to influence your colleagues and this is often far harder than most would predict. One of the best tactics is to use social proof by finding a colleague who has done the kind of thing that you want more people to do. It greatly helps if you are able to deliberately mention this example (or ask them to share what they've done) to your colleagues, ideally including how they benefited eg 'and they enjoyed volunteering so much that...'. Think of a current work project where the involvement and action-taking of colleagues is essential. Who is already doing the right thing, or who would be most likely to do so that others will be swayed by their example? Go to them first (eg in advance of the main meeting).

5 Sponsorship forms. When you do a sponsored run or trek, think very carefully about who you approach first with your Just Giving page or sponsorship form. Research shows that if one of your more generous friends writes their sponsorship amount at the top it increases the overall amount of sponsorship that will be pledged through the list as a whole.

You've been working on:

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