

## **My bubble, you squeak**

philosophical fundraising reflections

-----pb-----

## **Dedication**

For charity, without whom this book would not have been possible

-----pb-----

“philanthropy seems to have become simply the refuge of people who wish to annoy their fellow creatures”  
(Oscar Wilde)

-----pb-----

## **1. ‘So how much did your house cost?’ (and other questions you never hear anyone ask)**

Fundraising is not made easier by the squeamish attitude the English have to giving money. This chapter explores the English attitude to money and its impact on fundraising. As the Chair of an appeal committee put it to me, “I’ll do anything you want, just don’t ask me to ask anyone for any money’. It also examines why money that is lost hurts proportionately more than the happiness we gain when money is found. It also explores regional variation, looking particularly at the ‘yorkshire inversion’ where discussions about money are much more common place.

-----pb-----

## **2. Assessing the risks of risk assessments**

A polemic in support of creativity. “Art is not a mirror to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it”. How taking risks is actually the most effective way of gaining safety. “Life has become safer as human society has experimented...Safety was not something that could be acquired just by wanting it. Those who propose avoiding risks and gaining safety will invariably find that what they acquire instead are obsessions” Frank Furedi. The rarity of creativity, how it can be managed within teams, how it can be cultivated. Comparing the daring of charity founders versus the timidity of much present day management. The story of Thanks a Million. In defence of gut instincts. The problem with planning. The need for innovation, flexibility and risk taking.

-----pb-----

## **3. Divide and conquer**

Introducing the concept of division (and by implication team work) which shows how an intimidating fundraising target can become manageable providing the fundraising burden is one shared amongst a group and not just by one individual. The need for different skills and temperaments. Fundraising is a group activity.

#### **4. Svengali or go-between fundraising**

Exploring the limits of the fundraiser. Who drives the relationship? Do people choose to give money or do you force them to? What should you do? Is giving an emotional or an intellectual response? Does one work better than the other, does one lead more to long term change? Do the ends justify the means? "People respond to rewards and recognition somewhat like performing seals" "The supply-side analysis implies that the role of fundraisers... is not so much to **create** as to **discover** the philanthropic impulses of wealth holders"

-----pb-----

#### **5. Prevention is sexier than the cure: saving money better than money raised**

A rarely explored argument in favour of charity work is the extent to which we save the country money in the long run by preventing cycles of decline and dependency. This appeals to the British attitude to money and actually opens up a rare possibility for discussing money openly, in that the British will talk openly about money saved, but not money spent ('I bought this in the sales').

-----pb-----

#### **6. 'I don't care about money, I just want to be wonderful'**

This Marilyn Monroe quote sums up many charity worker's attitude to fundraising. They have less than no interest in it, indeed can often be hostile to it, seeing the harm that money can do to the lives of those they work with. This chapter reflects on why hostilities often break out between fundraisers and other charity staff, and also examine the hostility of 'the general public' to the concept of a paid fundraiser.

-----pb-----

#### **7. My bubble, you squeak**

Drawing on the work of social anthropology, this chapter reflects on the threat to fundraising caused by the increasing individualisation of our society, and the extent to which we become demographic islands, separating ourselves from much of our society. By failing to see our connectedness, people will not give to others, as they will not see their connection or responsibility towards others. We can squeak all we like, but those in their own bubbles will not hear us.

-----pb-----

#### **8. Giving is good for you**

The act of handing over cash is psychologically rewarding for the giver. It is a means of making connections with others, which reduces our narcissism and our self-centredness and also gives us a truer sense of perspective on our own problems. Should charity giving be seen in such (ironically) self-centred ways? Should it be used as a means for self-fulfilment, a way of purchasing a clean conscience? Isn't that better than giving through amnesia (direct debit) i.e. don't try and win the argument just hope people don't notice it).

-----pb-----

## 9. G Force

Why do people give money, and how has this changed over time? Looking at the different motivations of gift, guilt (if you can't comfort the afflicted, then afflict the comfortable), growth, grace and gratitude.

-----pb-----

## 10. 'Even a blind chicken finds some grain'

Whatever else you do in fundraising, look busy. The expectation to be involved in time-intensive activities, the way we can use busyness to hide our ineffectiveness, or as a way of obscuring our blind panic about our inability to control the income streams we are responsible for. The way community fundraising often serves a wider social purpose. The need for time management: "My laziness has really helped me out. Because I've only got so much energy I channel it into things that I know are important. It ends up looking like integrity. It's great. There's only so much time in a day, so I just do one thing and I do it well." Ricky Gervais.

-----pb-----

## 11. Charisma, leadership and illusion

Charities are often ambivalent towards notions of leadership. There is a feeling that leadership is a bit patriarchal, Victorian and oppressive. However laudable this might be, the reality is that the vast majority don't think in this kind of way. They want to be lead, they want someone to tell them where they are going, they want to hand over the responsibility for direction to someone else (so they can moan about them of course). Leadership is a key skill in fundraising, clarifying the vision, explaining how people will get there, supporting and resourcing people in the tasks, knowing the capabilities of those amongst the team. It is even more true with the donors. They like to know where their money is going, in all senses of the phrase. Donors also like to give to successful causes, they wish to bask in the reflected glory of their support of a successful cause. Reflections on the 'donor experience'. No-one wants to touch a drowning man.

-----pb-----

## 12. Begin with the basics

One of the core competencies in fundraising – which I've never heard acknowledged in any fundraising training – is that of being polite. People feel ambivalent and confused about money as it is, it really helps if we can be polite when acknowledging it. If there is a pre-requisite of good fundraising, it is saying please and thank you. Not rocket science, yet something that passes by many charities. If we do say thank you, we normally say it in a way that says 'thanks, but we really wish you'd given us more'. It is also polite to engage in two way conversations, rather than boring the pants of the poor supporter with what you want to say – does your communications allow that? It is also about valuing someone for who they are, not what they give, they are more than a purse or wallet.

-----pb-----

### **13. Emotional Intelligence**

Is there any difference between sales and fundraising? A greater interest in, and need for, emotional intelligence. Not only for being able to understand how and why people respond to your cause in the way they do, but also to enable you to cope with the often difficult task about talking about traumatic problems. The need for detachment and the danger of over-identification with the cause.

-----pb-----

### **14. An agent of change or a force for conservatism**

I know someone who gives money to a hospice because he thinks it cancels out him smoking 20 cigarettes a day. To what extent is fundraising an unwitting perpetrator of the very problems it tries to address? Are we selling ourselves too cheap, pretending our puny donations make more difference than they do (in order to persuade more to give them) - 'solve global poverty for just £2 a month' - so selling people a clean conscience and perpetuating the tackling of the symptoms rather than tackling the cause? 'the public will always believe a simple lie rather than a complex truth' Alexis de Tocqueville, 1805-1859. Sponsored foreign fundraising 'events' (trips) have subverted Ghandi's famous quote that "you must become the change you want to see in the world" to "you must give your change to see the world".

-----pb-----

### **15. Planning your way out of a bag: how fundraisers can help the service deliverers**

Fundraisers are the necessary evil, often literally kept in the corner, or even off site, away from the 'vulnerable' people the charity works with who could be exploited or mis-led by the fundraisers who infect the organisation with their corrupt 'money' mentality. And yet...when we do our job well, we use the skills that need to be seen throughout the charity rather than just its fundraising function. Everyone does marketing, but if you don't know that you are, you are probably doing it badly We should carry out good research to identify unmet needs, we should use creativity to find innovative solutions to proven problems, we should trial new ways of working before refining and rolling out, we should anticipate resource implications, we should be able to balance the potential benefits of different options and choose the best ones, we should monitor the effectiveness of our work, we should constantly evaluate.... Wouldn't it be good if all charities did this all the time? How do we get out of our fundraising ghettos and infect our organisations with some sound fundraising thinking?

-----pb-----

### **16. Jackanory, tell me a story**

The love of gossip, our interest in people is a mark of self-preservation. The story of Larry Myers. Larry Walters – 33 yrs old – lawn chair over Los Angeles – always wanted to fly – had parachute, CB radio, six pack of beer, peanut butter sandwiches, BB gun to pop the balloons, flashlight, extra batteries, altimeter, 45 helium filled weather balloons. Glasses fell off on ascent, dropped the gun, flew to 16,000 feet (3 miles up), crashed into power lines, blacked out a neighbourhood. Fined \$1,500 for "operating a civil aircraft for which there is not currently in effect an airworthiness certificate" and for being in airport space and not contacting the control tower.

"It was something I had to do," Walters told The Times after his flight from San Pedro to Long Beach on July 2, 1982. "I had this dream for 20 years, and if I hadn't done it, I would have ended up in the funny farm." "If the F.A.A. was around when the Wright Brothers were testing their aircraft, they would never have been able to make their first flight at Kitty Hawk," said Mr. Walters, who plans to challenge the fines. A regional safety inspector, Neal Savoy, said the flying lawn chair was spotted by Trans World Airlines and Delta Airlines jetliner pilots at 16,000 feet above sea level. "We know he broke some part of the Federal Aviation Act, and as soon as we decide which part it is, some type of charge will be filed," Mr. Savoy said. "If he had a pilot's license, we'd suspend that. But he doesn't."

-----pb-----

### **17. To be radical is to honour the tradition**

-----pb-----

### **18. Divine compost**

Fundraising as a timeless legacy. Memento mori. "Having created a society of unprecedented sophistication, nobody can remember what it was supposed to be for" (Clifford Longley)

-----pb-----

### **19. Bang for your buck**

Why minimising costs is more important than familiarity. It's the means to an end, not an end in itself.

-----pb-----

### **20. 'Plant a tree under whose shade you do not expect to sit'**

It's not fundraising, it is changing societies. Do as I say, not as I do? The need for ethics and long time frames. "It takes a lot of slow to grow" Eve Merriam. "These are my principles. If you don't like them, I have others" (Groucho Marx).

-----pb-----

### **21. The Porcupine Principle**

A German fable about how we need to be neither too close nor too far apart. Give your publicity the porcupine test. Kate Fox is freakishly accurate with her description of the English as socially inept, people who treat their own names as if they are some highly private information which should only be shared with the closest of friends. Unfortunately for fundraisers, good manners are one of the foundation stones of good fundraising. Being friendly, but not too friendly.

-----pb-----

**22. A clash of political ideologies**

Fundraising ain't socialism, it's rampant capitalism (better to knick another charity's supporters than to make a new one). It's about competition, not co-operation. Tales of disastrous joint-initiatives between charities. Making the world a better place or organisational survival: which would your trustees choose? 'If you want to change the rules, you have to play the game first' - Professor Amin Rajan

-----pb-----

**23. The need for the geek: putting 'boring' into fundraising**

-----pb-----

**24. Sanctified by use: can money be laundered?**

-----pb-----

**25. Rejection, self worth and shelf life.**

"At my core, the glass isn't half empty, it's not even what I ordered in the first place" Catherine Tate

-----pb-----

**26. The altruism axis**

-----pb-----

**27. Jahoda's latent functions of work**

What volunteers need to enjoy being a volunteer.

- 1. Structuring of time (if not, depression, lack of purpose)
- 2. Shared experience with non-family (means to manage stress, ability to cope)
- 3. Creativity, mastery and purpose
- 4. Status and identity
- 5. Activity, physical and mental effort

-----pb-----

**28. 'It ain't why you do it, it's the what that you do'**

How unpopular causes need to motivate people by the process more than the cause.

-----pb-----

**29. Numbers ask questions, they don't give answers**

The need for a counter-balance to the obsessive rationalistic model of work. 'the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing' Blaise Pascal. "I happened to see you passing through my life, so I thought I'd love you. "

**30. Only as good as the product.**

What to do when you've tried everything. The need for self-preservation and the Monday edition of the Guardian.

-----pb-----

**31. No-one ever thinks they are rich**

Would you prefer £50,000 if most people earned £25,000 or £100,000 if most people earned £200,000?

-----pb-----

**32. "From this distance, they couldn't hit an ele..."**

General John Sedgwick. Never ask for money until you see the whites of their eyes.

-----pb-----

**33. Poor people can't afford cheap goods**

The need to think modestly but with adequate investment

-----pb-----

**34. Think product not process**

One of the truly thankless tasks of any fundraiser is trying to get a charity to agree what it actually does. This very often pits departments against each other as they engage in some Lord-of-the-rings style battle for the organisation's soul, when all a fundraiser wants is a slogan.

The mission statements of many charities seem to be deliberate parodies. 'The Earnest foundation is here to empower people to make informed life choices in a positive, non-discriminatory and enabling way'. Sorry, but what on earth does that mean? Even when you try and make progress, the usual response is to talk about the work carried out e.g. we run an HIV clinic, a soup kitchen, Tai kwondo for under 11s and a toddler group. Still no-one talks about the end product. Why are we doing these things? For the sake of doing them? I don't think so. We do them because we want to see people gain employment, to contribute to wider society, to make our communities safer and stronger. But so often charities don't talk about this, they just talk about why they are motivated to do their jobs, not what difference they make.

If not that, they get squeamish about a charity being seen to 'take credit' for anything, as that credit should go to the charity's client/user/patient/add your own jargon. Again it is an admirable instinct but it makes us look like we're insignificant and that the client/user/patient/add your own jargon would have done it whether we were there or not. It's this muddled thinking again and it can create real problems for fundraisers in arguing the cause. Talking about products not processes also has the wonderful advantage of being brief. 'Praxis get people back into work, enable people to overcome their addictions, provide housing for low paid workers' etc etc.

For a financial giver, they want to know what would happen if the charity wasn't there and what is happening now that it is. Staff and volunteers are very often motivated by the process of doing something, but for a funder they often just want to see what is being bought with their donation. Very often the problems with agreeing what a charity does are the lightning rod for frustrations about the charitable status of the organisation. Why do we have to explain ourselves to the outside world? Why should we have to beg for this money, it should be a right? Why do we have to spend 'all this money' (never just 'money') on marketing anyway? For more on this, read the chapter on 'being charitable'.