

Powerful donor motivators for fundraising

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People are more likely to donate to pledge drive appeals when fundraisers tap into peoples' desire to help others, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Donors are also more likely to respond to appeals that involve negative emotions than pitches about benefits to the donor.

Authors Robert J. Fisher (University of Alberta), Mark Vandebosch (University of Western Ontario), and Kersi D. Antia (University of Wisconsin-Madison) examined scripts for pledge breaks at a public television station. "The research findings suggest that viewers donated because they felt an obligation to do so—people expect self- or social censure if they don't help when they feel empathy for a person or organization they care about," they write.

Prevailing wisdom holds that people are generally selfish. Yet when it comes to donation appeals, it seems that potential donors are motivated by appeals that involve the benefit to others: the station, the community, or specific groups of people other than themselves.

The authors' research involved close examination of scripts for four fundraising campaigns for a public television station. There were 584 scripts and 4,868 appeals in total. The researchers categorized the appeals into types (commercial-free programming, funding cuts, premiums or gifts for donors). In addition to comparing the promotional tactics, the researchers also coded each appeal for its emotion value. Donors responded better to negative appeals—such as those that mentioned funding cuts to the station—than joyful ones.

The researchers note that shame can be powerful motivator. "Failing to help under these conditions often leads to shame, which is a powerful negative emotion that is experienced when there is an inconsistency between a person's actual and desired self."

"Paradoxically, it is by helping others that we derive self-benefits in the form of enhanced self-esteem and social approval—serving others connotes valued human traits including compassion, cooperativeness, and kindness," the authors conclude.

Source: University of Chicago Press Journals

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