



brightideas

Winter 2020

From Ron Rescigno

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It's Your Responsibility to Build Relationships with Your Donors. . . not Theirs

Letting your donors know, both by your words AND by your actions, that their support is important to your cause seems like a no-brainer.

But consider the following: *how many of your donors really feel like a partner in the work you do?* Making them feel like valued partners is a key to keeping your donors and building their support.

At Rescigno's, we help organizations build strong relationships with some common-sense practices:

- New donors receive special acknowledgements thanking them for including the organization in their charitable giving.
- Have a board member call new donors to thank them and ask why they decided to give. Is there a personal connection? Did someone in the community make a recommendation?
- Contact donors who increase their giving, especially when the gift transitions into major giving. Welcome them to the group or club that fits with their new donor status. Invite them to major donor activities.

Remember, when a donor makes a move to get closer to you, let them know that you notice.

We can help you create stronger relationships with your donors. It's on you, not them, to see that it's done.

Let's talk about how we can be of service to your fundraising efforts. Call us at 708-974-2600 or email ron@rescignos.com.

Ronald P. Rescigno

Ron Rescigno



What Makes a Good Story?

In some ways it's strange that people who fundraise for a living need help in describing the important work their organizations do. In other words, in turning the "work done" into effective stories that motivate donor philanthropy.

When it comes to telling a story, you've got to appeal to both the head and the heart. It's been my experience that nonprofits are really good at the head part—like statistics. But to really tell a compelling story, you've got to get the reader to feel something like pain, joy, hope, despair, etc.

In short, **emotion must rule when it comes to fundraising stories.**

While people may disagree about whether a book or movie is any good, most will agree on what draws them into a story. They care about, identify with, or are fascinated by characters and want to know what happens to them. **That is why you should always be putting clients, students, patrons, beneficiaries, and volunteers into your stories. They are your organization's characters.**

Think of the "Wizard of Oz." There's a hero or protagonist (Dorothy) who is trying to achieve something and an opponent, threat, or crisis (Wicked Witch of the West) that may prevent her from achieving her goal.

Put this into context of a student at a community college. The student who is hoping for a scholarship is the beneficiary of a \$2,000 gift from a donor. The nonprofit organization is the "connector" that facilitates the donor being able to impact a student's life.

Don't over-complicate this. Donors need to identify with a character and see how they can help a situation. And along the way, they want/need to experience suspense, drama, fear, or joy.

Rescigno's is very fortunate to have an award-winning writer on its staff. If you're looking for someone to do the creative on your next appeal, give us a call at 708-974-2600, 105 or email Ron at ron@rescignos.com.



Please join us in welcoming both Jackie S. Joines, CFRE, and Lynnette Doherty to our team of Fundraising Professionals!

The Rescigno's team has grown yet again!

We are happy to welcome Jackie S. Joines, CFRE. As a Senior Fundraising Consultant, Jackie recently retired as Executive Director for College Advancement at Lake Land College where she oversaw foundation operations and alumni services for the past 5 years.



She led efforts that grew the Foundation assets from \$8 million to \$12.8 million. As part of the Foundation strategic plan, Jackie led efforts to construct a new \$2.2 million Foundation and Alumni Center on campus and implemented a new Foundation brand. Also, Jackie formerly served Eastern Illinois University as Director of Development for 17 years. Jackie holds memberships in AFP, and CASE, as well as many community organizations.

We are also happy to announce that Lynnette Doherty has joined the team as Marketing Manager for Rescigno's. Lynnette has a background in marketing, communications, fundraising and development. Lynnette is proud to help deliver Rescigno's message of partnership and expertise to fundraising professionals around the country.



Rescigno's
Fundraising Professionals

We can consult with you on your

- Annual Fund Program
- Acknowledgment/Retention Programs
- Donor Communication Plans

And provide the following services

- Copywriting/editing
- Design
- Data Analysis
- Data Wealth Screening
- List purchases
- Print
- Mail

ALL under one roof!

5 Real-Life Excuses from 2019

Rescigno's has been in the business of helping non-profits for almost 28 years now. During that time, we've heard some far-reaching "excuses" for why fundraising isn't working at their nonprofit.

As a fun exercise, I'd thought I'd share a few with you:

- Excuse #1 – *Our development director didn't raise the money she was expected to raise.* **Truth:** Success in fundraising comes from a shared responsibility for cultivating relationships with donors. This includes the board and the president or executive director. The development director is the creator and overseer of the plan, but others must help to implement it.
- Excuse #2 – *We hired a fundraiser who was supposed to bring his own donors with him.* **Truth:** People don't give to the fundraiser; they give to the cause. It is your cause and impact that attract serious investors.
- Excuse #3 – *We decided to make our major gift officer our development director. That didn't work out so well.* **Truth:** Expecting a former major gift officer to manage a department and build a program is a very risky proposition. Many MGOs may be great when it comes to connecting with individual contributors, but not necessarily very good at all when it comes to running a department.

- Excuse #4 – *Facebook and Twitter did not bring in the money others said it would.* **Truth:** Though you should be thinking about your next generation of donors, be careful not to neglect your current ones. Especially if you have a limited budget. Don't spread yourself too thin. For example, a 2 or 3-person office trying to do annual fund, events, major gifts, planned giving, and online giving plus social media probably is not doing a great job at any of these.

People don't give to the fundraiser; they give to the cause. It is your cause and impact that attract serious investors.

- Excuse #5 – *Our development director's energy and charisma are off the charts, but we're still not raising very much money.* **Truth:** Energy and charisma don't necessarily mean fundraising success. Some of the most effective fundraisers we've come across are quiet, introspective listeners rather than outgoing and effusive.

Holiday Campaigns Don't End on 12/31

You don't put your supporters on what I like to call the "pay no mind list" at the end of the calendar year, I'm sure.

The end of the holidays is no time to relax.

Now that we've crossed over into the New Year, it's time to report on what you and your donors have accomplished, and to broach the subject of the new or continued challenges you'll be facing in the coming months. These challenges, of

course, urgently need to be addressed through continued donor support.

Now is the time to invite your donors to expand their role in your cause by coming up with **new ways to engage and involve them.**

For example, you can invite them to subscribe to a newsletter that will offer exclusive updates and photos or give them VIP access to a special section of your website.

Right now is the time look back on 2019 and, most importantly, get donors and prospects engaged enough to help you as you build a strong future for your organization.



2020
2019

Hunting for the Wealthy

Do you know who the wealthiest people in your community are? I'm guessing the answer is yes.

If your board is anything like boards I've been involved with, those wealthy are who your board thinks you should be approaching.

"If only we could get so and so to donate. We'd be in the money then!"

I'll bet you've heard that one from a well-meaning board member before. If only it were that easy.

I certainly hope you took the opportunity to explain to your board member that fundraising just doesn't work that way.

Here's something you could say next time the subject comes up: *"Listen, what we need to do is concentrate on the donors who are already on our list. Chasing after someone else's donor is like chasing after a rainbow. You're never going to get to that particular pot of gold."*

If you're thinking that sounds a bit harsh, so be it.

They may say back to you, *"But the people on our list don't have the potential to give us as much as so-and-so could."*

Say back to your board, "Well maybe you're right, but maybe you're wrong. How do you know for sure?"

What board members think they know about the finances of other people is often very inaccurate. There are some people who live well beyond their means, while others have significant wealth, yet live very simply.

Also, people's circumstances can change quite a bit over time for any number of reasons. Think back to how many people of means had their homes foreclosed on during the recession of ten years ago or so.

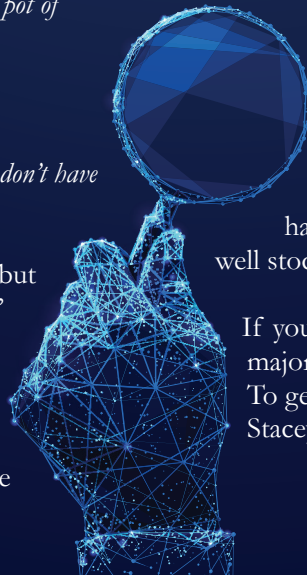
My point is to remind your board members that you have plenty of prospects in your donor and prospect pool. But you need their help in finding them and engaging them in the mission. There needs to be a reason for them to care enough to get involved. For example:

- Is there some important volunteer work for them to do?
- Is there a fun event coming up that you could invite them to that would show them your organization's human side?
- Have you produced a compelling impact report that shows them what you're doing?
- Have you called or visited any of these donors recently?

These are all activities that may engage donors. Don't forget, this won't happen overnight. Patience is the key word.

Don't go hunting for someone else's big donor unless you have reason to believe he or she may have an interest in your organization. Instead, busy yourself by showing the donors you already have how much appreciation you have for them. I'm betting your pool of prospect is well stocked.

If you're not sure who is and isn't a prospect for a major gift, let Rescigno's do some research for you. To get started, call us at 708-974-2600, 101 or email Stacey at stacey@rescignos.com.



Are You Asking for Minor Gifts from Major Donors?

Each time you make an ask, are you sure you're asking for the appropriate amount? If you're like most, when you acquire a new donor with a \$50 gift, your strategy is probably to move that donor up to \$75 or even \$100 over the next couple of solicitations.

And that's good. Getting new donors to double their initial gift is always a good thing.

But what if you knew something more about the donor? What if you knew that the donor who was giving you a small, if upgraded gift, was actually capable of much, much more?

Would it change your strategy?

Knowing this kind of information means you would be able to solicit much more meaningful gifts from supporters.

More importantly, it should also help you to understand which donors should be receiving more of a personalized strategy.

A better targeted and more personalized cultivation strategy leads to increased giving.

Recently, we've been helping a number of our clients formulate a more strategic approach to upgrading wealthy donors who have historically given low-dollar amounts. We still pay attention to when, how often, and how much a donor is giving, but we're also adding other data that allows us to more fully develop each donor's potential to give.

If you'd like Rescigno's to help you with a more personalized cultivation strategy that leads to more revenue, you know we're here for you.



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Check out our **brightideas** ahead!



Rescigno's is a team of fundraising experts, but what does that really mean?

It means the Rescigno's team is distinctly equipped to handle any non-profit organization's annual fund program, from start to finish, completely in-house.

Our services include:

Fundraising Consulting • Letter Copywriting and Editing • Creative Graphic Design
Data Analysis • Print Production • Mail Fulfillment



One more Bright Idea: More than ever, donors want/need to know where their money is going—concretely. They don't want to be told it went to “help kids” or to “save the environment” or to do “research.” Be specific. Thank, report back, and then ask again. You will retain more donors when you explain to them how you wisely used their money.