



# WHAT SCHOLARS & PRACTITIONERS SAY ABOUT THE NARRATIVE FUND-RAISING RESEARCH & WORKSHOP



# ORIGINS OF THIS RESEARCH & WORKSHOP ON FUND-RAISING LANGUAGE

**At Claremont Graduate University**, Peter Drucker's advice focused my research on the language of fund raising. That research was shaped by his intentionally undemocratic and imbalanced perspective about which were the most important goals a leader must plan for and achieve. Peter was quite provocative, writing:

***"Marketing and innovation are the foundation areas in objective setting. It is in these two areas that a business obtains its results. In all other objective areas the purpose of doing is to make possible the attainment of the objectives in the areas of marketing and innovation. Because its purpose is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two—and only these two—basic functions: marketing and innovation. Marketing and innovation produce results, all the rest are costs."***

Drucker had just finished his book on nonprofit management when I was his student in the early 1990s. He helped me to see that as marketing is critical to the success of any business, ***so too fund raising is critical to the success of any nonprofit***. And for commercial and nonprofit organizations alike, I came to see that the effective use of ***language*** is the critical factor in crafting a successful marketing or fund-raising message. My research profiled the broken discourse of fund raising. And now, ***The Narrative FundRaising Seminar*** shows how, by fixing the way you write, you can raise more money. Here's what thought leaders are saying:

"Frank, thank you for providing such an insightful workshop. I walked away knowing what I need to work on and how to improve my storytelling. This was the most useful training I've had as a fundraiser. Thanks again for sharing your knowledge."

***Giuseppe Nespoli, Director of Seaver Associates  
Pepperdine University***

"Frank, your workshop was the best seminar on effective fundraising communication I've ever attended! Thanks. I will definitely recommend your workshop."

***Russ Gibbs, D.Min, CFRE  
Asst. Dean & Director of Advancement, University of Houston Law School***

"I completely agree with your take on the way we write. So much communication sent by great organizations is poorly crafted. And that makes it difficult to get people to listen."

***Joan Smythe Dengler,  
Sr VP Covenant House***

"Thank you for sharing your research. This is very interesting work and of course extremely relevant for a large nonprofit organization like CARE. We know the importance of language in delivering our message to donors and the public, and it is both interesting and helpful to read your analysis of the current problems that plague written fundraising communications."

"We've also been testing similar variables that you mentioned in your study, such as simulated hand-written fonts and nonprofit stamps vs. first class rate to name a few. And, we continue to learn from our testing and tweaking of direct mail copy as well."

"Your research will be invaluable to us as we continue to try to 'crack the code' on what will motivate individuals to take action through our direct response vehicles."

***Kymerly McElgunn Wolff, Sr. VP of Development  
Habitat for Humanity, Formerly Sr. VP CARE***

“This research agrees with what almost anybody who spends any time looking at the way nonprofits communicate already knows: Most fund raising copy is wooden, artificial, dull, and ineffective.”

**Jeff Brooks**  
*Future Fundraising Now & TrueSense Marketing*

“Imagine my pleasure realizing you’re the author of the piece I read a few days ago that I hoped to commend in my e-newsletter. One of my chums in the nonprofit world said: ‘Look, we’re NOT all nuts; and here’s the research to prove it!’ Thank you. You’ve done everyone a big favor. Lousy written communications are costing the industry gazillions in lost revenue.”

**Tom Ahern, Principal**  
*Ahern Communications Ink*

“Fantastic. Great job in dignifying what I have practiced: ‘Write the way you talk.’ I still do it and still dictate all my letters.”

**Jerry Huntsinger, Founder**  
*Huntsinger & Jeffer*

“Frank I’ll be brief. Awesome, as my young Canadian associates say. Keep it up and if you get to London--well, if you don’t call me for a pub-crawl you’re not half the man you think you are! Here is to the preservation of wisdom.”

**John Sauv -Rodd, Principal**  
*Datapreneurs, London*

“Dr. Dickerson, as part of his doctoral studies at Claremont Graduate University, in California, recently analyzed more than 1.5 million words of online and printed fund-raising texts to determine how effectively fund raisers communicate with their audiences. While his findings were enough to fuel a 350-page dissertation, his thesis can be boiled down to a few short words: Most fund-raising copy stinks.”

**Peter Panepento, Asst. Managing Editor**  
*The Chronicle of Philanthropy*

“Dr. Dickerson shared the results of his exhaustive analysis of more than a million words of fund-raising copy. He explains why nearly everything he studied came up short.”

**Mal Warwick, Founder & Chair**  
*Mal Warwick & Associates*

“I was pretty impressed. We need more research into the ‘soft side’ of fund raising. Story telling is where it’s at!”

**Gail Perry, Principal**  
*Gail Perry Associates*

“I am a better fundraising writer today thanks to the Narrative Fundraising workshop at Vanderbilt. Dr. Dickerson revealed the science behind crafting a successful fund appeal, using simple, direct language that tells a compelling story.”

**Bill Smith, Sr. Director of Grants and Fundraising Services**  
*Second Harvest*

“What an interesting extension of narrative research, Frank! Indeed, there are hardly any studies (that I know of!) that deal with the effectiveness of story-telling in fundraising—though it’s taken for granted, somehow, that without a good story one’s appeal for funds will not get you far. Let me hear more about what you’re up to. It’s very consciousness raising.”

**Jerome Bruner, PhD**  
**New York University School of Law**

“Frank, I tend to throw away many fund-raising letters and I never thought about analyzing the content and determining what works. I am pre-conditioned to favoring certain charities and causes and pay little attention to other solicitations. But your language analysis and findings are critical to practitioners.”

**Philip Kotler, PhD, Professor of Marketing**  
**Northwestern University**

“Frank, this is amazing work, just the kind of thing we should be doing more of.”

**Grant McCracken, PhD, Research Affiliate**  
**Massachusetts Institute of Technology**

“This research is a wake-up call based on solid evidence, and it couldn’t come at a better time.”

**Andy Goodman, Principal**  
**The Goodman Center**

“Dr. Dickerson, I enjoyed hearing that you are another language vigilante struggling to keep everyday writing clear and plain. The subject of fundraising writing has never crossed my path in all my years of teaching various forms of writing. Thank you for your contributions to this craft.”

**William Zinsser, Author of On Writing**  
**Columbia Graduate School of Journalism**

“Wow, we are true soul mates when it comes to fund raising. Terrific. This stuff is great. I can’t wait to highlight it in my work.”

**Katya Andresen, C.O.O.**  
**Network for Good**

“Frank, a very impressive study. Having been in direct mail for more than 30 years, your research is a window to the craft of words and how important copy is to successful direct marketing. In fact, given that twitter only allows 140 characters, I think the ability to write clearly and concisely is even made more important through social media.”

**John McIlquham, CEO**  
**The NonProfit Times**

“Frank, wonderful stuff and we’d like our 7000+ readers of *The Agitator* to benefit from it.”

**Roger Craver, Founder**  
**Craver, Matthews, Smith**