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ARE WE DOING A GOOD JOB?

By John Nickson

Marketing people and fundraisers should always walk hand in hand. We are more effective when we do. I learned this lesson during more than twenty years as a director of fundraising and I need not explain why to this readership. The arts have done phenomenally well in generating new income because they have had to. I was responsible for fundraising at The British Council, English National Opera, The Royal Academy of Arts and Tate from 1987 to 2011 and during this time central and local government grants fell from around 80% of budget to less than 30% in some cases. The shortfall has been made up by a combination of fundraising, increased admissions and new commercial enterprises. We can proudly demonstrate real return on investment. Those of us who had a clear and well-articulated mission and vision, informing both marketing and fundraising, did best of all.

Could we do better? The answer must be yes. I was forced to confront reality when I wrote *Giving Is Good For You* last year. My book is about fundraising but has a message for all in marketing. I have written a polemic in praise of philanthropy and my primary purpose is to persuade those who are not giving to follow the generous example of those who do. After publication, it became clear that the book has another purpose: to reveal what motivates those who give, what would motivate them to give more and their attitudes to those who ask for money.

I hope *Giving Is Good For You* may help all who are responsible for generating income because we know that success dependent upon understanding our public. On the basis of the interviews I conducted with donors in various parts of the UK, my conclusion is that fundraising is not yet fulfilling its potential and the remedy has implications for ALL charity managers AND their trustees. The arts have performed particularly well but, according to those who give, performance is patchy and the verdict is "could do better".

I interviewed almost 80 donors, charity and public sector leaders and fundraisers in various parts of the country. Everyone I met told me that giving had transformed their lives, whether they were funding a refuge and re-education centre for sex workers in Newcastle, or research into poverty with positive outcomes for slum dwellers in Bangladesh and the rural poor in Zimbabwe.

I learned how people become homeless in Britain, how music helped Manchester become one of the wealthiest cities in Europe and has transformed the academic performance of primary school children in Brixton. I learned how philanthropy is helping to save the lives of those with cancer who need oral and maxillofacial

surgery and how the death of a young woman in Afghanistan prompted her parents to support those who suffer most in war: women and children. Everyone I spoke to, whether they were giving or receiving, spoke to me with great feeling and conviction. Decisions about giving are deeply rooted in the emotions of those who give and this has profound implications for those of us who are seeking their support.

We need some context. According to NCVO and CAF in 2013, charitable giving is declining in the UK whilst inequality is growing. There has been a colossal increase in the wealth of the top 1% and their share of national wealth in the past 30 years. Only a minority of the wealthy is giving. Coutts bank estimates 10% of those selling their businesses are philanthropic. This matters as we now have international evidence proving how damaging and destabilising inequality can be in terms of health, violent crime and governance.

Those who give are the fiercest critics of those who do not. Some were so outspoken that their comments had to be censored. They are acutely aware of their responsibility to society and concerned that a more widespread lack of a sense of obligation to others may become a threat to the civil society so many of us take for granted. Together, we produced a manifesto for change and the need to create a culture of giving and gratitude in Britain. We have recommended measures ranging from changes to tax relief, national honours and education.

What are the specific lessons to be learned by the arts? Some have been infuriated by Maria Miller, Culture Secretary, who has said the arts should get better at asking. She has a point. Despite conspicuous fundraising success, our case for supporting the arts is not strong enough. We fear competition with welfare charities. How can culture compete with cancer research? Perfectly well if we are more robust about saying that life is not worth living without culture.

Donors are clear that they will give and give more only if they feel engaged with a cause, that they are inspired by a mission and vision that is articulated by every one in the executive and on the board, that they have confidence in governance and the ability of the executive to deliver and that they are convinced they are adding value. How will they know? By being acknowledged and thanked in a meaningful and sophisticated manner. This requires a commitment by everyone, not least by trustees who must ALL be seen to be giving, however little.

I asked a donor friend for her views after attending a recent museum and galleries conference. She told me: "Despite honourable exceptions, the arts need to make a much better case, both individually and collectively, they are too defeatist and defensive, their trustees don't have a clue, they aren't willing to invest and they don't take a long term view about developing relationships".

Public spending will continue to fall whoever wins the next election. The state is in retreat, the voluntary sector faces growing demand and there will be increasing competition for both discretionary spending and charitable giving. The arts need to think hard about how they position themselves as a deserving cause whether they are pitching for public, corporate or private money.

John Nickson is one of Britain's most experienced fundraisers. He is the author of *Giving Is Good For You: Why Britain Should Be Bothered And Give More*. (www.bitebackpublishing.com) He is donating his royalties to the Royal College of Music Scholarship Fund and to MQ: transforming mental health (formerly known as Insight). He blogs regularly for The Huffington Post UK and is on Twitter@johndnickson.

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