

BY Kivi Leroux Miller

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE LIKE THEIR FAVORITE NONPROFIT

*Kivi Leroux Miller will tell you that what she knows she's learned as a do-it-yourself nonprofit marketer. Author of The Nonprofit Marketing Guide: High-Impact, Low-Cost Ways to Build Support for Your Good Cause, Miller presented a seminar at Rally 2013 on the topic described in this article. She has helped dozens of nonprofits large and small, community-based and nationwide, to get the word out about their work; recruit new members, donors and volunteers; and develop creative strategies that worked, all on limited financial and staffing resources. She says, "I wouldn't know what to do with a million dollar budget. I'm used to working in the four- and five-figure ranges." She has also served as board president, vice president, treasurer, secretary and "regular ol' board member" for several different nonprofit organizations. "I appreciate the big picture and the minutiae of running successful nonprofit organizations," says Miller.*

## The Statistics

First, let's outline the problem.

- We get 3,000 media messages a day.
- We pay attention to about 52.
- We positively remember about four.

As for the rest? We think, "So what, who cares?"

Now let's examine statistics about donors.

- The donor attrition rate between the first and second gift: 55%–65%
- Loss of regular or sustaining givers from one year to the next: 30%
- First gifts not as generous as they could have been: 75%

So how do we keep the love alive? Here's a big hint: It has *nothing* to do with your admin/overhead percentage.

## The Reasons Behind Giving

Why do people give so much in December? Here's another big hint: It's not really about the tax deduction.

*People help because it makes them feel good.*

Why else?

- 57% support nonprofits because the cause is "important to me or someone I know."
- 50% get involved because "it is something that has impacted me or someone I know."
- 38% get involved because "I feel like I can make a difference."

How donors feel predicts their behavior. Here's how you want them to feel:

- "I am a committed (nonprofit) donor."
- "I feel a sense of loyalty to (nonprofit)."
- "(Nonprofit) is my favorite charitable organization."

And here is the statistic we should all be paying attention to:

Half of donors give two-thirds of their annual donations to a *single favorite charity*.

So then the real question is: How can you become their favorite nonprofit?

## The Inner Bookkeeper and the Inner Angel

When we look at behavioral economics,\* which is the study of the effects of social, cognitive and emotional factors on the economic decisions of individuals and institutions, we see two norms:

1. Market Norms: making decisions based on the self-interest and personal benefits of the transaction
2. Social Norms: making decisions based on community, cooperation or altruism for psychological rewards

We can view these as the "Inner Bookkeeper" and the "Inner Angel."

There's some bookkeeper in all of us.

What the Inner Bookkeeper likes is:

- Facts and Figures – Numbers of all kinds!
- Budgets

\*Read Dan Ariely or just Google "Homer Simpson for Nonprofits" and "Lisa Simpson for Nonprofits"

- Tax Savings
- Tax Receipts
- Overhead/Admin Percentages
- Logistics
- Event Announcements

But we are mostly Angel, and the Angel always wins. Angels want to feel:

- Appreciated
- Included
- In the know

You need to think of your donors as both of these: Keep the Bookkeeper happy but really focus on the Angel.

You'll know you're succeeding when:

- You understand your donors' inner angels.
- You create communications that are relevant to their lives.
- You create opportunities for people to connect and engage.
- You become a favorite organization.
- People say Yes! when you ask them.
- You get what you need to achieve your mission!

### Decide Who You Want To Be

You can connect with your donors, both the Bookkeepers and the Angels, by deciding which of these things you want to be, or even choosing some combination of them.

Be a *helpful friend* who directs client services, is down to earth, friendly and casual, and who is spot-on with pragmatic advice.

Be a *trusted authority* who wants to be perceived as the expert, is more straightforward and well-documented and is both objective and opinionated.

Be a *reliable performer* who is good with basic donor relations for ongoing work, trustworthy with donors' support and tells stories that show the impact of that support.

Be an *innovative changemaker* who is not afraid of big, hard goals, is bold, focused and driven, and has a recognizable spokesperson associated with the organization and its messaging.

Think about what each of these would look like if applied to your land trust. Ask yourselves, "Who would

## Is My Message Relevant?

Try to check off at least two of the Six R's of Message Relevance with each of your messages.

-  **It's Rewarding**  
 The **benefits** to following through on the call to action are clear.
-  **It's Realistic**  
 The **barriers** to following through on the call to action are addressed.
-  **It's Real Time**  
 It makes sense given the **context** and what else is happening right now.
-  **It's Responsive**  
 They can tell we are **listening** and taking what we hear into account.
-  **It's Revealing**  
 We are sharing or showing something **new or interesting**.
-  **It's Refreshing**  
 The style and tone are **authentic** and maybe a little **surprising**.

**This checklist works a lot better when you are clear and specific about your target audiences and your calls to action!**



be most important for us to communicate with? What would be in our newsletter or on Facebook? Who would be the face of our organization?”

## Relevant Messaging

Decide who you are, then stay connected to your Angels by being relevant in their lives. Follow the six Rs of relevant messaging:

### 1. It's Rewarding

The benefits of following through on the calls to action are clear. Rewarding messages:

- Make donors feel awesome.
- Make donors feel like they are part of it.
- Let donors celebrate, even when the mission is serious or sad.
- Let donors express themselves.

Ask yourselves this question: Where's the reward for supporting the land trust for someone who doesn't own land on which you would like to put an easement?

### 2. It's Realistic

The barriers to following through on the call to action are addressed. Realistic messages:

- Acknowledge and address donors' fears head on.
- Acknowledge that donors may really care about things you consider tangential.
- Make it easier to follow through.
- Acknowledge that they aren't experts like you.

Think about examples of where your land trust should be more realistic in its communications with donors.

### 3. It's Real Time

It makes sense given the context and what else is happening right now. Real-time messages:

- Connect to what donors are already hearing about.
- Acknowledge what else is happening in their lives.
- Are often planned in advance!
- Don't wait for an annual report to show progress.

Plan some land trust communications for the biggest events in October and November. Both Halloween and Thanksgiving have readily built-in messages for

## Resources for Board Members

Share *Saving Land* magazine with your whole board! While every member land trust of the Land Trust Alliance receives three copies of the magazine as a member benefit, individuals who join the Alliance at the \$35 level and above will receive their own copy of the magazine. Invite your land trust board members to join as Alliance individual members at [www.lta.org/join](http://www.lta.org/join).

More board resources available:

- Sign up your board to receive the free *Field Guide*, a quarterly newsletter that delves into the complexities of specific issues facing board members. Go to [www.lta.org/boardservices](http://www.lta.org/boardservices) to subscribe and see samples of past editions.
- Board members can also access the *Board Collection* on The Learning Center using their land trust's log in [<http://tlc.lta.org/tlc/collections>]. It's a central resource for board-related articles, tools and information.
- Once on The Learning Center, board members can also network with colleagues in the Land Trust Board Members group and tap into the expertise of conservation experts across the country in the Ask An Expert forum.

the land trust community. Families flock to farms around Halloween to pick pumpkins or celebrate harvest events. Thanksgiving centers around abundant food. What would happen to these holidays if land were not available to grow food and fiber?

### 4. It's Responsive

They can tell we are listening and taking what we hear into account. Responsive messages:

- Show that your organization is full of helpful humans.
- Prove to donors that you can relate.

You must think about how you say what you say, because what you want to say is carrots and broccoli. What donors want to hear is cheese. What you need to produce is a broccoli/cheese casserole.

What are the top three questions people ask about your land trust? Where are the answers?

### 5. It's Revealing

We are sharing or showing something new and interesting. Revealing messages:

- Let us learn alongside you.
- Can challenge us.
- Share the backstage story.
- Take us behind the scenes.

What back story can you tell? How can you take us behind the scenes? What did

you do this year with the money you raised at last year's big fundraiser? Tell donors what their support accomplished.

### 6. It's Refreshing

The style and tone are authentic and maybe a little surprising. Refreshing messages:

- Have fun!
- Can make you look twice.
- Express an opinion.
- Keep it straightforward and simple.

What's the funniest thing about working for a land trust?

### The Bottom Line

Good communications build rapport and make people feel good about their relationship with you. My favorite quote from Maya Angelou is: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget **how you made them feel.**"

The favorite nonprofits win. To become your donors' favorite nonprofit, speak to the Inner Angel and be more relevant. 🍌

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