

CLICHÉS THAT WORK

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What do these phrases have in common?

*Think outside the box.
A breath of fresh air.
Few and far between.
At the end of the day.*

Right you are. We call all of them clichés. Most of us immediately recognize these as such, whether we use them or not. Most of us also agree that English is full of expressions that are widely considered to be clichés, even if we can't arrive at a consensus about just which of many expressions deserve that label or, for that matter, how "cliché" should be defined.

There is an old saying that every profession has its jargon, that special vocabulary, including some words specific to it and, often, narrower senses of words that most would tend to take in a broader sense. So it is with fundraising. We use clichés, jargon, if you will, as well—or as badly—as the next profession.

However, and it is the thrust of this brief article, many of these special words and phrases really can be useful in improving our efforts, in enriching our calling (in both senses!), and in getting our points across to our stakeholders. So, with little apology, here is one person's brief effort in applying these phrases, often downgraded to cliché, to our daily work. Hold on to your hats!

It takes three to tango. Just like a wheelbarrow, or tricycle, fundraising has 3 wheels, staff, volunteers, and "fundraisers." If all of them are rolling smoothly, the question is never "Will we (succeed)?" It's "How much will we raise?" If 2 wheels are rolling, the organization may succeed, in spite of itself. If only 1 wheel is rolling, you can figure out what happens. And whose job is it to steer the bike? The fundraisers, of course. That's why we're called the big wheels!

Good fundraising is like a marathon, not a sprint. We live in such a "now" society that we seem to anticipate immediate results. Of course, sometimes that happens, but often, like fine wine or the 26+ miles of a marathon, it just takes time. Savor the opportunity. Use the time to develop strategies, make friends, and build relationships, all those values that will serve you and your organization well far beyond the "close." To use another very appropriate cliché that warms the cockles of this former Classics teacher's heart, "Rome wasn't built in a day."

We have met the enemy and he is us. One could also use "We are our own worst enemy." Written by the great cartoonist, Walt Kelley, in the depths of the Vietnam War, it is still relevant today. Fundraisers, and lots of others as well, often take their work too seriously, do one *i* one time too many, make one too many asks, one too many phone calls, one too many tasks, all in a somewhat overdone try at closing that big gift. In doing so, they get in their own way and may lose all they've worked for. Relax. Relax. Relax. Step back and look at the big picture. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

There are 5 "rights" to successful fundraising. The right person...asking the right person...for the right gift...for the right purpose...at the right time.

There's more to (fundraising) life than money. In explaining the motivation of charitable giving, fundraisers are fond of quoting the psychologist, Maslow. In his hierarchy of needs, Maslow recognized the human need for esteem and social recognition, but at the peak of his hierarchy was the need for self-actualization, the need to fulfill one's potential. However, we refer to our profession—Fundraising/Development/Advancement—it affords our prospects an opportunity to fulfill their own highest potential through the good they may do for others. In this sense, it can truly be said that the Page

“business” of development is not a matter of dollars and cents, but primarily one of human values and human purposes.

Everyone is a fundraiser. A somewhat bedraggled gentleman entered the office where I had my first fundraising job. He asked to see “the person in charge.” Seeing his shabby get up, our well-meaning but misguided receptionist, for whom “development” was not specifically mentioned in the job description, made a hasty evaluation and rebuffed him, saying in not the most professional or courteous manner, I will have to admit. “There’s no one who can see you right now.” After a couple of unsuccessful attempts, he left, taking his check for \$50,000 with him! Point made, I think.

In closing, remember this little ditty, which should sum up what we do (or *don’t do* or *should do*):

I'm not allowed to run the train; the whistle I can't blow.
I'm not allowed to say how far the railroad cars can go.
I'm not allowed to shoot off steam, nor even clang the bell.
But let the durn thing jump the track and see who catches [censored, but you get the point!]

All's well that ends well! Off to the races!!!