fireside fundraising

Five Step Storytelling



Fireside Fundraising

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'Stories are the fire that we carry to each other.'

Bobette Buster, author and academic.



Why stories matter

Many of us know that our emotional brains are faster than our logical brains. But many of us don't realise just how *much faster* the emotional brain is – up to 2,000 times!

Because your emotional brain is just *so much faster* than your logical brain, you can't help but make decisions for emotional reasons. You're asked a question and you leap to an emotional answer.

Your logical brain then races to catch up. But, because you want to prove yourself right, your logical brain catches up by actively looking for logic that agrees with your emotional decision. This means if you get the emotional factors right, even the most logical brains will be biased into making the decision you want.

Stories are the strongest shortcut we have to an emotional decision. They can make or break the best charity approaches.

5 steps to tell a story

When asked to tell a story, we think of a polished case study or a perfect video It can be scary to try and think of something on the spot. But a story can be a single sentence, if you're including the right ingredients. **We recommend sticking to the 5 simple questions:**

Individual

Who is the individual at the heart of this story? Is there anything you can tell us about this person that makes them feel real?

Issue

What is the problem this person was facing? What did this problem mean for them, and what were the emotional consequences?

Intervention

What did we help this person do about this problem? How do we explain that service simply?

Impact

What does that mean for that person? How is their life different now, and how do they feel about it?

Imagine

What would've happened if the person in this story had never met your charity? This is how the story ends for people who your charity hasn't helped yet.

These steps allow you to tell a story in as much or as little detail as the situation calls for. See an example on the next two slides.



An example: Alex's story

Individual: We met Alex in 2013, when he was 14. Alex has myotonic dystrophy, which he'd known for 4 years. Ever since he was little, he'd loved race cars.

Issue: He said 'the world came down on me when I got the diagnosis', because he knew what lay ahead – from increasing fatigue to issues walking, talking and even swallowing. Fundamentally, Alex's condition made him feel isolated.

Intervention: But nothing makes him feel like he belongs more than a racetrack. Ever since he was a child, he wanted to be a racing driver, and watching races would help the pressure of his daily life melt away for a moment. That's why when his mum Colette saw our racing dream experience she nominated Alex for a place.

A few months later, Alex was one of ten young people with muscle wasting conditions who joined us at Silverstone, the home of British motorsport. Alex had two days of tyres on tarmac: from doing donuts in a Porsche to racing round the actual Grand Prix track.

Impact: After these two days, Alex said he felt like he could 'conquer the world'. The experience made him determined for his racing dreams to be a plan, rather than a fantasy.

Imagine: In 2026, Alex's condition is getting worse, including occasional difficulty talking. But because he was able to put tires to tarmac, he is much more than his condition: he's been racing for 10 years, won 8 championships, and is instructing other young drivers who don't want their disability to hit the brakes on their dreams. He's the role model he needed at 14. **It's hard to say that any of this would've been possible if we weren't there, believing in him when he needed it.**

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Using the bullet points on the previous slide, we can also tell Alex's story in a single sentence:

Through our racing experiences, we gave myotonic dystrophy patient Alex a chance to 'conquer the world' – which led him to be one of the first professional disabled racing drivers.

(Shared with permission from Muscle Help Foundation)

Using these stories

By creating both the longer and shorter form versions of your story, you give yourself the tools you need to tell stories:

- In meetings, when you're building emotional connection
- In emails, when you're trying to nudge a response
- In impact reports, when you're demonstrating the difference made.

All of which give you the opportunity to go from telling the story of an individual to the story of your organization. Using these individual stories as your key ingredient, you can build a recipe for pitches and proposals. When done right, these will get potential partners climbing over the table to work with you.

Places to go from here

Reach out to your services and communications colleagues to ask them the interview questions on slide 3 – build your story bank step by step.

Build your organisational approach to gathering and telling stories – storytelling is a team sport, so get your team together, and if you realise you need a team coach...

Get support to build your organisational pitch or case for support – quote 'Fundraising Everywhere' in your email for 15% off. The first step is a call with no commitment.

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