Evaluating University-Based Nonprofit Leadership and Management Programs: A Critique

Frank C. Dickerson, Ph.D.

Executive Summary
(Summary: 5-Minute Read)

In the course of my doctoral research on the language of fund raising, Margaret Atwood, author of *The Handmaid's Tale*, wrote to me about what she characterized as an old writer's joke. Atwood gave credit for the following narrative to another Canadian author named Margaret—Margaret Laurence. This dinner table banter explains my surprising research findings:

*A man sits next to Margaret at a Toronto banquet. He introduces himself, asking, **"What do you do, Margaret?"** She replies, **"I'm a writer."** With enthusiasm, the man says, **"Really! When I retire I'm going to become a writer too."** Margaret politely reciprocates, asking: **"And what do you do, sir?"** He replies: **"I'm a neurosurgeon."** With a twinkle in her eye, Margaret shoots back, **"How interesting, I always thought that when I retire, I'd take up brain surgery!"***

The lesson of the tale: ***We think writing is easy and we take it for granted***. But good writing is anything but easy, as my linguistics research at Claremont Graduate University confirmed. I was one of Peter Drucker's students in 1990 just as he completed his book, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization*. From Peter I learned that the C.E.O. of a nonprofit organization has two jobs:

- **Job 1:** the mission the nonprofit exists to achieve.
- **Job 2:** raising the funds needed to achieve **Job 1**.

In discussing **Job 2** with Peter, we talked about failed colonial attempts to raise funds for a college in the Massachusetts Bay colony. That talk led me to a vein of scholarship in corpus linguistics which University of Southern California linguist Doug Biber had developed.

In the 1980s, Doug had used factor analysis to describe how often 67 linguistic features showed up in 23 text genres. This ability to see patterns in texts led me to frame this research question: "Which text genre are fund appeals most like?" Computer analysis of 1.5 million words in 2,412 texts gave the answer.

I hope this article will provoke you as you read about the surprising discovery I made. And I hope that provocation will spark a conversation on how **Nonprofit Leadership and Management Programs (NLMPs)** can better equip students for the task of raising funds for the organizations they will eventually serve.

Narrative writing skills are essential for a fund raiser and an asset for those in jobs touching on policy, governance, and advocacy. This is demonstrated in a case from Moritz College of Law at my alma mater, The Ohio State University. It describes the mischief newspaper mogul Horace Greeley made when the Whig party had him fill a vacancy for the second House session of the 30th Congress in 1848. "What harm could he do in 90 days?" they thought. But Greeley found a way!

Greeley was upset by a law providing for a 40-cent per-mile travel reimbursement. It computed distance by the "usually traveled route." To Greeley, disbursements were a wasteful relic of an earlier time. The 40-cent per mile rate had been calculated to match a pre-1816 congressman's pay rate of $8 a day, assuming one could travel a mere 20 miles per day. But in an era of fast train travel, the portion of

that 40-cent per mile payment that had originally been intended for lodging ***was no longer needed***. Congressmen ***pocketed the extra money***. In his House term, trips from Springfield netted Abe Lincoln $650 ($18,500 now): one of the worst offenders.

So during Greeley's short term of mischief-making, he had time to challenge an out-dated congressional travel policy. More recently, the headline of a 2014 *New York Daily News* article dramatized the power of a brief narrative to shed light on bad governance:

> Huge ten inch drill bit almost skewers Jamica-bound F train. With 800 souls aboard around 11:45 a.m. Thursday, the drill came spiraling through the top of the tunnel. It narrowly missed the car, sparing passengers from impalement.

The exposé concluded that an employee of MTA sub-contractor Griffin Dewatering had erred. A near-tragedy thus raised important policy and governance questions like this most basic query: ***"Had the contractor vetted his employees?"***

Their narrative form gave these cases power. Both illustrate how a story can make a reader scared, sad, glad, or mad enough to act. Fund raising, policy, and governance are all rooted in narratives that define problems and demand solutions.

A narrative fund appeal casts a reader in the leading role of hero in a story. It lets a reader envision how she or he can feed a hungry child, educate a needy student, or put healthcare within a family's reach. My report raises questions:

- Does a program just survey a wide range of fund-raising strategies or do students learn how to actually create and present appeals in writing and face-to-face? Then is their writing and verbal delivery practiced and critiqued?

- Given that any message is only as strong as the language from which it is built, does a program offer a stand-alone course on writing appeals using a character-driven narrative arc that resolves a story's conflict by *asking for a gift?*

The need to ***diversify fund raising beyond foundations to the general public*** was underscored by Juliet Musso, director of University of Southern California's top-rated NLMP. Of her former role at a foster family agency in Los Angeles, Juliet writes:

> I was occasionally engaged at the Chair level in fundraising, including meetings with philanthropic funders and potential donors to discuss the organization and its goals. During my tenure, the organization hired a professional development officer and evolved its fund-raising approach from a primary emphasis on large philanthropic grants and direct County contracts to one that much more heavily emphasized direct giving. This was necessary for financial sustainability because County-level foster care contracts have too little administrative overhead to support effective foster family services, while philanthropic gifts [grants] typically will not cover ongoing programmatic costs.

> The organization is now considering a merger with a much larger multi-focused family resource organization, which would provide some advantages of scope and scale that a small FFA cannot attain. As this experience suggests, I am acutely aware of the constraints facing nonprofits, particularly those in the perpetually underfunded social services.

iii.

My review found that NLMPs cover three functions that are similar to the leadership that a ship's captain exerts:

- *Policy:* charting a ship's course to its destination
- *Governance:* tacking into the wind to adjust course
- *Funding:* provisioning the resources a crew needs to function

Most programs focus on policy and governance and pay much less attention to funding. I admit a prejudice going into this review, given I've had a 50-year career in fund raising. And I admit gaining appreciation for how narrative writing is important in policy, governance, and advocacy. But programs fail to address a serious problem–the typical fund appeal:

- Reads like an academic paper for a professor who is no longer there rather than for a potential donor.
- Contains less narrative than an official document, preferring abstract prose over describing concrete scenes.
- Lacks the three types of characters common to storytelling: protagonist, antagonist, and ensemble cast member.
- Fails to use action, conflict, imagery, and dialogue to make a reader scared, sad, glad, or mad enough to act.
- Neglects to cast a donor in the role of hero by showing how his or her gift can bring resolution to the story told.

Program evaluation has a storied history. In 1909, The Carnegie Foundation had Abraham Flexner evaluate America's medical schools. Most were **long on lecture** and **short on practice**. So of 155 schools, 89 were purged for incompetence.

Then in 1990 Ernest Boyer, president of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, called for a greater focus on **practice** in education. He framed that call as a return to Ezra Cornell's **Scholarship of Application**. Many NLMPs seem to assume funds will always be present from the government or foundations. So they neglect to teach the practice of raising funds from the general pubic—**even though 68% of $427.21 billion donated in 2018 was from individuals!**

And there's also neglect in another area of practice—**writing**. Most nonprofit leaders seem to still be writing for a professor who is no longer there, rather than for a person they hope will give. NLMPs need to teach the practice of narrative. It's a writing style that can convince the doubting mind, touch the complacent heart, and move the reluctant will to give. But narrative must not be allowed to **camouflage** a cause or **suffocate** an ask. Fund raising, not storytelling, is the end goal. A dramatic narrative arc can create an emotional connection between a reader and a person facing a conflict. It can show the scene of that conflict with concrete language. And it can invite the reader to bring resolution to the story told by giving.

The failure of an NLMP that would neglect to teach nonprofit leaders how to raise funds is as irresponsible as the failure of an engineering school that would neglect to teach engineers how to calculate stress factors for load-bearing structures. Fund raising is a nonprofit's *conditio sine qua non* (the condition without which not). Apart from motivating people to care and give, programs are shut down, staff are laid off, and policies become irrelevant since there's nothing left to be governed!

My review of programs follows. And the last page includes links to several resources.

An Evaluation Parable

In the year of our Lord 1432, there arose a grievous quarrel among the brethren over the number of teeth in the mouth of a horse. For 13 days the disputation raged without ceasing. All the ancient books and chronicles were fetched out, and wonderful and ponderous erudition, such as was never before heard of in this region, was made manifest.

At the beginning of the 14th day, a youthful friar of goodly bearing asked his learned superiors for permission to add a word, and straightaway, to the wonderment of the disputants, whose deep wisdom, he sore vexed, he beseeched them to unbend in a manner coarse and unheard-of, and to look in the open mouth of a horse and find the answer to their questioning.

At this, their dignity being grievously hurt, they waxed exceedingly wroth; and, joining in a mighty uproar, they flew upon him and smote him hip and thigh, and cast him out forthwith. For, said they, surely Satan hath tempted this bold neophyte to declare unholy and unheard-of ways of finding truth contrary to the teachings of the fathers.

After many days of grievous strife, the dove of peace sat on the assembly, and they as one man, declaring the problem to be an everlasting mystery because of a grievous dearth of historical and theological evidence thereof, so ordered the same writ down.

Francis Bacon

Does Your Program Cover Fund Raising?

Like Bacon's friar, who asked his elders to *look into the mouth of a horse to count its teeth,* this review asks each Nonprofit and Leadership and Management Program (NLMP) leader to look at his or her program. How adequate is its coverage of *fund raising?* And does it even address the *narrative language of fund-raising*?

I have reviewed more than 300 university-based programs for students who aspire to careers in the nonprofit sector. In those programs, I found that the tension caricatured above is present in two domains:

• *theory*, focused on propositional knowledge
• *practice*, focused on applied knowledge

Psychologist Kurt Lewin observed, "there is nothing so practical as a good theory." Corollary to that is the principal that "there is nothing so good as a theory that is practical." I saw this *theory-practice* tension as a freshman at Ohio State, majoring in communication.

The curriculum spent little time on how to communicate. Instead, theory dominated the field. So I switched majors and chose to study the earliest origins of communication. I read widely in the classics.

I saw communication *practice* in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics,* in the letters of *Pliny,* and in other works of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

So I admit a prejudice that favors theory tied to practice. I was impressed in my review by essays on policy and governance that tied conceptual models to real-world issues. On *fund raising*, however, coverage was often inadequate. A few programs were strong. But virtually none taught the *language* of fund raising.

This prejudice has also been fed by my graduate research. I used multivariate analysis methods that had been developed by University of Southern California linguist Doug Biber. Using factor analysis, Biber found a way to predict voice and tone across 23 text genres based on the co-occurence of 67 linguistic features.

Using Biber's methodology, I *profiled how fund raisers write* by analyzing 1.5 million words in 2,412 fund appeals. I found that they read like academic prose, were abstract, highly informational, and contained less narrative than official documents. On the next page, reviews of my work by scholars and practitioners affirm this problem, suggesting that this report is long overdue.

Scholars & Practitioners Agree: Fund-Raising Language Is Mission-Critical. It Is Badly Broken. And It Must Be Fixed!

"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, 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 280 characters, I think the ability to write clearly and concisely is even made more important through social media."

John McIlquham, CEO
The NonProfit Times

"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."

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

"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 McCraken, 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

"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

"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 Commmunications Ink

"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

Working for the public good has long been a noble ambition in the United States. After French statesman Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in 1835, he wrote:

> In America I encountered sorts of associations of which, I confess, that I had no idea. And I often admired the infinite art with which the inhabitants of the United States managed to fix a common goal to the efforts of many men and to get them to advance to it freely. There is nothing, according to me, that deserves more to attract our regard than the intellectual and moral associations of America.

Those who make a profession of raising funds for a nonprofit organization follow a high calling. Moreover, the nonprofit sector is an integral part of the American economy. The Urban Institute, observes that nonprofits contribute 5.4% to America's GDP.

The most recent Urban Institute data puts the revenue of 1.56 million nonprofits at $1.98 trillion against $1.84 trillion in expenses. Almost half of all nonprofit sector revenue comes from fees for services and the sales of products. America's universities, for example, receive the majority of their revenue from tuition and government support. Much of that revenue came from the $1.47 trillion that is now owed by 44.7 million students. Their school loans exceed the sum total of all credit card and auto loan debt combined.

In 2018, the rest of the sector's income, Giving USA reports, came from $427.71 billion in charitable giving: $292.09 billion (68%) given by individuals, $20.05 billion (5%) by corporations, $75,86 billion (18%) by foundations, and $39.71 billion (9%) in bequests. Foundations, usually make no gifts to support operations. Individuals in the voluntary sector like those who impressed de Tocqueville *still give the most!*

Yet many NLMPs appear to operate under the false premise that nonprofit funding comes primarily from governments and foundations. So they offer little training on how to solicit gifts from individuals. One NLMP leader went so far as to give this cryptic reply to my query about what fund raising training their program had: "The emphasis on fundraising is off key to us. The curriculum focuses on strategy by the various players in the social sector, which raises issues about funding." *Off key* seemed to be code language for "we talk *about* funding, but not about actually *raising* funds!"

James Blaisdell told Pomona College graduates: "They only are loyal to this college who, departing, bear their added riches in trust for mankind." Likewise, major funders should be helped to give generously and strategically. But foundations tend to act like parents who give their child a head start toward self-sufficiency. Eventually their child has to make it on his or her own. A foundation may fund a symphony hall. Once built, audience development and patron gifts must sustain it. So for NLMPs to diminish fund raising is irresponsible.

To judge the adequacy of their curricula on *fund raising* and *fund-raising language,* I reviewed the web sites of more than 300 NLMPs, looking for answers to ten questions. I also noted remarkable deficits or strengths.

Ten Questions

- Are courses specifically on soliciting funds present?
- If present, how many fund-raising courses are there and what specific areas of fund raising do they cover?
- Does any course focus on fund raising *language*?
- Are specific learning objectives listed for courses?
- Are the names of both the permanent and adjunct faculty members teaching fund-raising courses listed?
- Are those faculty members' backgrounds posted on the program website or available in CVs?
- What evidence indicates that faculty members who teach fund-raising courses are qualified to do so?
- What of kinds of research do faculty members do?
- Do any faculty members research fund raising?
- Is website information current and thorough enough to allow for well-informed decision making?

My impression of NLMPs as a whole is that they lean more toward *theory* than *practice.* They exhibit the kind of problems Abraham Flexner saw in North American medical schools. His 1910 report documented how medical schools of the era failed to offer enough *practical laboratory instruction.*

Given that foundations account for just 18 percent of charitable giving, a fund-raising curriculum must offer *practical instruction* in more than just grant writing alone. Many programs are MBAs tweaked a bit for those working for nonprofits. But that is inadequate.

Eventually MBAs diversified, cutting courses to make room for in-demand fields. As MBAs did, so NLMPs must add more fund-raising courses, especially instruction specifically on the *language* of fund raising.

Abraham Flexner

Such educational reviews have a long history. As noted, The Carnegie Foundation had enlisted Abraham Flexner—an educator, not a doctor—to visit medical schools across America. In 1904 there were 166. By 1935, only 66 schools remained, the survivors of the much-needed purge of sham schools. Flexner excoriated schools for their dearth of *practical training*. They were *long* on lecture and *short* on practical labs.

Here are samples of Flexner's blunt reviews: "It is idle to talk of real laboratory work. Its so-called equipment is dirty and disorderly beyond description. Its outfit in anatomy consists of a small box of bones and the dried-up filthy fragments of a single cadaver. It is stretching terms to speak of laboratory teaching in connection with them at all. It is hardly more than make-believe. The college did not own a dollar's worth of apparatus of any description whatsoever."

Medical schools' lack of cadavers led to ill-prepared doctors. NLMPs' lack of training in fund raising leads to ill-prepared nonprofit leaders. Lack of funds means programs get cut, staff get laid off, and *policy* is irrelevant since *there's nothing left to be governed!*

My study suggests a review of NLMPs would benefit the sector. Not having space here to compare all 300 programs, below I have summarized information gleaned from the website of one of the nation's top programs at University of Southern California.

USC Price School's Dean, Jack Knott, reports U.S. News rates their Publilc Policy program 2nd in the U.S. and its Nonprofit Management program 4th. USC's Nicolas Duquette has taught a course that included, among several topics, a unit on fund raising. Another course focuses on "adaptations of charities to changes in government grants and tax subsidies." And yet another professor "teaches courses on public policy."

USC's web site says that it also "provides the critical skills and training necessary to lead complex nonprofit organizations. Students work closely with leading nonprofit executives, augmenting the class-room curriculum with real-world field work. The school provides students unique access to leading-edge research and practices in the fields of philanthropy,

nonprofits, and social innovation." This statement suggests a strong *practice-based* orientation. But is it still too *theoretical?* The fact is, few specifics are listed.

Nonetheless, some language on the USC site insists that their program goes beyond theory and that students will get involved in *real-world* learning experiences. Bolstering this view, terms used include:

- critical skills • training • necessary to lead
- augmenting classroom with real-world field work

A summary of their curriculum reports that it includes 42 units of coursework. Thirty of those units are "organized under three areas: Theory and Context; Leadership and Management; and Analytical Skills." These are rounded out by 10 elective units and an integrative Capstone where "students work in the field to apply the knowledge and competencies covered."

A weakness may be that of USC's 42-unit curriculum (2-units of which is a statistics course), only this single 4-unit course focuses on fund raising:

"Fund Development for Nonprofit Organiza-tions (4 units). Key aspects of the fundraising process for nonprofit organizations: major theoretical founda-tions and general fundraising principles; fundraising techniques; sources of donations; and key aspects of managing the fundraising process."

Although the word *techniques* appears in the description above, it appears this course may be more *survey-* than *skills-based*. Key words suggesting this are:

- major theoretical foundations
- general fundraising principles
- managing the fundraising process

Of course, the value a course delivers is in the details. And as a top-rated program, I assume those details are listed in a syllabus that says what a student will *know* and be able to *do* after taking the course. And USC's curriculum language *does* state that "students will work in the field to apply the range of knowledge and competencies covered over the course of study."

The current cost of a USC Sol Price School NLMP is *pricey* (pun intended) at $81,396.00 *sans living costs*. So, I would scrutinize every syllabus for more detail! After all, a Jaguar XJ runs $86,450.00 and I'm sure you'd test drive that *pricey* car before buying it!

This figure illustrates a *practice-based* teaching process called a Learning Loop. NLMPs should adopt this or similar pedagogies to teach fund-raising skills:
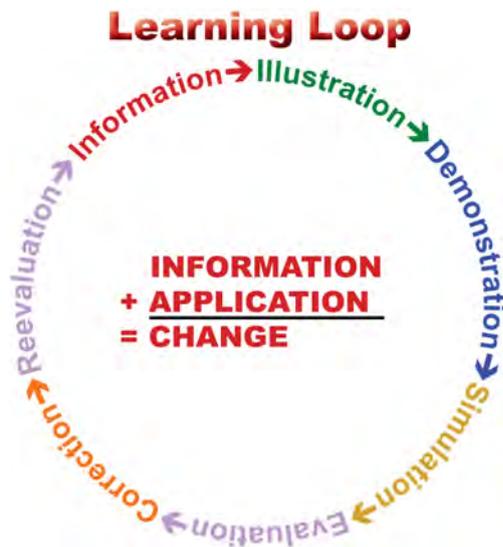
By using a Learning Loop process, fund-raising skills, including writing, can be mastered as students move incrementally through sequential steps:

Learning Loop Steps:

Information is presented verbally
Illustration elaborates on information
Demonstration shows the skill in action
Simulation allows the learner to replicate
Evaluation reviews a learner's performance
Correction allows a learner to plan adjustment
Reevaluation allows a learner to exhibit mastery

An NLMP program should offer more than a single survey course that acquaints students with an array of fund-raising strategies. Learning should include building *practical solicitation skills*. And my research also describes a dire deficit in *fund-raising writing skills*.

Most NLMPs focus on *theoretical* issues that touch on policy and governance and spend little or no time on the practice of fund raising. Perhaps these programs assume students will work for nonprofits funded by government or foundation grants. That assumption is naïve at best and irresponsible at worst.

It ignores two key objectives that Peter Drucker prioritized in his intentionally undemocratic and purposefully imbalanced view about which were the most important objectives a leader must plan for and achieve.

"Marketing and innovation," Drucker wrote, "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 achieve objectives in the areas of marketing and innovation."
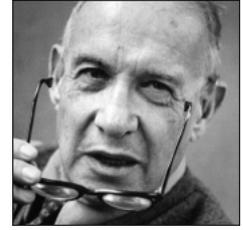
Peter F. Drucker

For Drucker, *marketing* and *innovation* were the touchstones of success because he believed the purpose of a business was *to create a customer.* That is why he unapologetically believed these "two—and only these two—basic functions" drive enterprises. Of other objectives he wrote: "all the rest are *costs*." So for a nonprofit, **this elevates fund raising to top priority**.

I was one of Peter's students in 1990 when he had just published his book, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization*. He related to nonprofits, the counsel he had dispensed to major corporations for fifty years: that **fund raising, like marketing, is central to survival**.

The questions he asked of business executives applied equally to the nonprofit leaders. A pragmatic thought leader, Drucker provoked with questions.

His questions forced clients to define decision points on the *policy side* of a business issue. Then from those analyses, he would quickly prompt leaders to decide how to do things better on the *practice side* of an issue. Drucker focused on *practice*—on what *to do*.

"If objectives are only good intentions," he'd say, "they are worthless. They must degenerate into work. And work is always specific, always has—or should have—clear, unambiguous, measurable results, a deadline and a specific assignment of accountability."

To properly apply Drucker's principles to the nonprofit world, it is important to realize that all nonprofits essentially operate two separate businesses:

• Business-1: The mission a nonprofit exists to achieve.
• Business-2: Raising funds to sustain Business-1.

To succeed at Business-1 *(mission)* a nonprofit must succeed at Business-2 *(creating a donor)*. A NLMP that fails to teach fund-raising skills is as remiss as an engineering school that fails to teach how to calculate stress factors for load-bearing structures. Fund raising for a nonprofit is *coditio sine qua non*—Latin for *the condition without which not*. And *language* is at its core.

The IRS NTEE (National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities) divides 1.5 million nonprofits into 9 types. These are further divided into 100 subdivisions.

This diversity is evidence of *innovation*, one of Drucker's two basic functions of an enterprise and a nonprofit's Business-1: its *raison d'etre* or *mission*.

However, most nonprofits fail at the second basic function of a business, *marketing.* For a nonprofit the cognate of marketing is its Business-2: *fund raising*.

So how can this problem be fixed?

Ernest L. Boyer

The same year Drucker published *Managing the Non-profit Organization*, Ernest Boyer, then head of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, published *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*.

Boyer's perspectives can improve how NLMPs educate and train future nonprofit leaders to raise funds for the sector. Here is the context of his call for change.

The classical curriculum of grammar, logic, rhetoric, and theology had been imported to colonial America from England. Then in 1862, Boyer observed, a seismic shift occurred that elevated practical learning:

"The practical side of higher learning was remarkably enhanced by the Morrill Act of 1862, later called the Land Grant College Act. This historic piece of legislation gave federal land to each state, with the proceeds from sale of land to support both education in the liberal arts and training it the skills that ultimately would undergird the emerging agricultural and mechanical revolutions."

Boyer noted that this shift was not warmly received in all quarters:

"Skeptics looked with amusement, even contempt, at what they considered the excess of utility and accommodation. They long resisted the idea of making the university itself a more democratic institution and viewed with disdain Ezra Cornell's soaring pledge in the 1860s to 'found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study.' Some critics even viewed the agricultural experiment as a betrayal of higher education's mission. They ridiculed the 'cow colleges,' seeing in them a dilution of academic

standards. Others recoiled from the idea that non-elite young people were going on to college."

Is the current hesitation among NLMPs to focus on fund raising rooted in views similar to those held by academics who disliked the Land Grant movement? Do detractors think teaching nonprofit leaders the practical strategies and language of fund raising is somehow a *betrayal of higher education's mission*?

You would think that what Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White created in Ithaca would, by now, have assuaged misgivings. The pattern they stamped has affected all of higher education. Their innovations *shifted the focus to all things practical*. Now Cornell is both an Ivy League school and New York's Land Grant University.

Ezra Cornell

But resistance to Cornell's practical and populist spirit persists in some quarters. The leader who said "the emphasis on fundraising is off key to us" is not unique. Even though foundation, corporate, and bequest gifts represent 32% of all giving, grass roots citizens like those whom de Tocqueville met give 68%. Not being prepared to solicit them is unwise.

In 1990 Boyer wrote: "What we are faced with, today, is the need to clarify campus missions and relate the work of the academy more directly to the realities of contemporary life." Boyer advocated for four types of scholarship in higher education:

- *The Scholarship of Discovery*, following the tradition of original empirical research
- *The Scholarship of Integration*, creating inter-disciplinary connections to find insights
- *The Scholarship of Application*, connecting theory to practice in order to solve problems
- *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, focused on equipping students to analyze and create knowledge

NLMPs must take a lesson from the shift to *practice* made in the 1860s and create more space in their programs for teaching fund-raising *practice* in addition to policy and governance, especially classes on the use of *narrative* in the *language* of fund raising.

I share Ernest Boyer's views on the *Scholarship of Application* that connects *theory* and *practice* to solve problems. Of this, Ezra Cornell was an example. He innovated glass insulators, making telegraphy feasible.

Innovator Cornell also saw his share of failure. But he resurrected one of his bankrupt companies in 1851 that became Western Union. The first company to offer coast-to-coast telegraph service, it was the child of *innovation*, it grew wildly successful by *marketing,* and Ezra's *philanthropy* gave birth to Cornell University.

My research was influenced by Boyer's Cornell-inspired *practice-oriented paradigm* and by Drucker's bias for *marketing* and *innovation.* I saw that these principles applied to businesses and nonprofits alike.

I further narrowed Drucker's premise that marketing is key to an enterprise's success. I further proposed that a fund-raising or marketing message is only as effective as the language from which it is built. That led to my study of fund-raising language.

Replicating an Indiana University study, my analysis of 2,412 fund appeals found that the typical text:

- Read like an academic paper written for a professor who was no longer there rather for a potential donor.
- Contained less narrative than official documents, using abstract language rather than painting concrete scenes.
- Lacked the three character types common to storytelling: protagonist, antagonist, and supporting cast.
- Didn't use action, conflict, imagery, dialogue to create tension that made a reader scared, sad, glad, or mad.
- Neglected to cast a donor in the role of hero by showing how a gift could bring resolution to the story told.

The exemplars below are **invented, not real.** Their intent is to illustrate the use of highly narrative and highly informational linguistic features. The left sample uses the storytelling style which has been found to yield higher response. The exemplar on the right is **intentionally over-written** to illustrate abstract prose.

Exemplar Help Send Carley to Camp *High Interpersonal Involvement-Style Fund-Raising Text*
Carley excitedly joined in when the club talked about going to camp, "I've never slept in a tent before, or gone in a canoe. Are there bears? And what's ah *Sa-More*?"
You could tell her 10-year-old mind was really racing and spinning dreams of what it'd be like. Being with best friends. Adventure. Animals. Cooking out on a campfire, all of which was exotic stuff to a child of inner-city Chicago.
Then last week when she came to the club meeting, I could tell something was wrong. "Hey now. . .You OK, honey? What's wrong?" I asked as kids were heading out.
Looking up, she waves bye to best friend Lori. Other girls had been laughing, planning and screaming as they left for home. Then when we were alone, and it was "safe," I heard again what I hear every year from a child whose mom is their family's sole source of support.
Carley had been turning her face so no one would see. Then tears almost come. She whispers: "Mama said I can't go to camp 'cuz we can't 'ford it." That did it. I felt my heart break.
I knew what it meant. Carley's little dream had slipped away. It takes money to send kids to camp, and her mom just doesn't have it. And I don't either. Carley would not be able to go to camp.
But I don't want to leave her. . .or *any* of her friends behind!
Twenty dollars is all we ask kids to pay. For you or me it's the cost of a few Lattes. But for Carley's mom, $20 is very precious because it might cost her kids a meal! They simply don't know where it would come from. They're truly unable to afford the cost.
So that's why I'm writing, John. I know you've helped before. Could you help us once more? Can you give $20 to help our girls?

Help Ameliorate Socio-Economic Asymmetry *High Informational Content-Style Fund-Raising Text*
Hard economic times are robbing moms who are their families' primary caregivers. A confluence of economic, social, and psychic impediments exacerbated by this crisis now constrains their ability to provide childcare, adequate housing, and basic nutrition for their families, especially in light of unrelenting and unprecedented economic down cycling. Consequently, little discretionary income, given their fiduciary responsibilities, remains for what social workers call *bridging* experiences, so salient to the development of youth.
Elucidating the *bridging* model is the development of the ever emerging and relevant corpora of findings confirming that such psychosocial opportunities are, indeed, quasi-constitutive of eight prominent variable factors in the neurobiological development of prepubescent working-class children. This was revealed by a seminal study, emanating from the Urban Action Group Lab of NorthSouthern University, validating the archetypal dynamics of *bridging* as a useful nascent sociological construct that finally accounts for two statistically significant 4-way correlations (valid at $\alpha = < .01$), between facilitation of educational pursuit persistence and salient *bridging* experiences, like camping. Although the factors relating to the development of environmental support structures relevant to the maximization of complimentary *bridging* opportunities both inform our heuristic and remain our prime directive, concern over economic asymmetry in inner city Chicago now threatens near-term paradigm realization.
Notwithstanding noteworthy economic drift, philanthropy yet continues to represent a multi-faceted linkage of networks which can be engineered toward eleemosynary initiatives that may well coalesce into a complementary array of educational, social, and pertinent psychological resources—*bridges if you will*—satisfying the socio-economically challenged. Help us facilitate amelioration of the economic asymmetry that so challenges Greater Chicago!

Table 1 on the next page illustrates linguistic features in *Help Send Carley to Camp* that create a *high involvement* focus while table 2 illustrates features in *Help Ameliorate Socio-Economic Asymmetry* that create a *high informational* focus.

Table 1 lists 23 linguistic features that create interpersonal involvement. Table 2 lists 5 linguistic features that create highly informational copy. The features that work together to create these effects are listed in descending order in column 1 of each table according to each feature's predictive strength (indicated as a factor loading score).

Table 1	Examples of Positive Features on Dimension 1 Showing How They Create High Levels of Interpersonal Involvement		
Linguistic Features in Rank Order	**Factor Loading**	**Characteristic or Function of Feature in Creating Interpersonal Involvement**	**Example from the Letter:** *Help Send Carley to Camp*
Private verbs	0.96	Expresses mental thoughts and feelings	*I **felt** my heart break…I **know** you've helped*
THAT-deletion	0.91	Reduces surface form, sounds conversational	*You could tell **[that]** her 10-year-old*
Contractions	0.90	Shortens words, adds fluency to discourse	***I've** never slept in a tent before…**They're***
Present tense verbs	0.86	Depicts immediate topics and actions	*Looks up and **waves**. . .Tears almost **come***
2ⁿᵈ person prns	0.86	Specific addressee, shows interactivity	*Would **you** be willing to help…**You** OK, honey?*
DO as pro-verb	0.82	Substitutes for a clause, reduces density	*That **did** it…And I **don't** either*
Analytic negation	0.78	Conceptually simpler form of negation	*She would not be able [versus **unable**] to go*
Demonstrative prns	0.76	Noun substitute, understood by context	***that** was exotic. . .**That's** why I'm writing*
General emphatics	0.74	Marks stance: affect, evidence, quantity	*10-year-old mind was **really** racing*
1ˢᵗ person prns	0.74	Marks ego involvement, interpersonal focus	*I **could tell**. . .I **know** you've helped before*
Pronoun *IT*	0.71	Marks relatively inexplicit lexical reference	*it [paying $20] **might cost her kids a meal***
BE as main verb	0.71	Communicates sate of being versus action	***all of which** was **exotic** stuff to a child*
Causal avb subord	0.66	Adverbial *because* or *as* mark causation	*because **it might cost her kids a meal***
Discourse particles	0.66	Attitudinal and structural discourse markers	*But **I don't** want…Hey now…So **that's** why*
Indefinite pronouns	0.62	General referent device often used like *IT*	*I **could tell** something **was wrong***
General hedges	0.58	Informal markers of probability or uncertainty	*tears almost **come**, and Carley says*
Amplifiers	0.56	Lexical *degree* words to magnify verbal force	*for Carley's mom $20 is **very precious***
Sentence relatives	0.55	Speech-like relative, comments on context	***all of which** was **exotic** stuff to a child*
Direct *WH-*?s	0.52	Direct questions, marks personal interaction	*What's **wrong? I asked** as kids were*
Possibility modals	0.50	Subjective, tentative, states possible reality	*Could **you** help us once more? Can **you***
Non-phrasal coord	0.48	And acts as loose general purpose connector	***Are** there bears? And what's ah Sa-More*
*WH-*clauses	0.47	Verb complement, to give personal viewpoint	*I **knew** what it meant. **Carley's** little dream had*
Final prepositions	0.43	Reflects surface reduction, marks speech	*simply **don't** know where it would **come** from*
(Adverbs	0.42)*	Often reveals stance, qualities and feelings	***Carley** excitely **joined in**…truly **unable***

* Because **Adverbs** had a higher loading on another dimension when factors were extracted, even though at +.42 they load above the |.35| minimum, they were not used in the calculation of Dimension 1: *Interpersonal Involvement / Informational Content*. However, they remain of interest. Although this is a fictitious letter I created, it is useful for illustrating traits of an *Interpersonal Involvement* style of discourse.
Note. Adapted from Biber, (1988, pp. 102-103 & 221-245).

Table 2	Examples of Negative Features on Dimension 1 Showing How They Create High Levels of Informational Content		
Linguistic Features in Rank Order	**Factor Loading**	**Characteristic or Function of Feature in Creating Informational Content**	**Example from the Letter: Help Ameliorate Socio-Economic Asymmetry**
Nouns	-0.80	Nominalization of verbs adds density	***amelioration** of the economic asymmetry*
Word length	-0.58	Long words lead make text hard to read	***Consequently**, little **discretionary** income*
Prepositions	-0.54	Tightly packs highly nominal discourse	***facilitation of** educational pursuit persistence*
Type/token ratio	-0.54	*Different* words (types) to *all* words (tokens)	***psychic social psycho**social: 2 types, 3 tokens*
Attributive adjectives	-0.47	Used to expand and elaborate meaning	***adequate** housing, and **basic** nutrition for*
(Place adverbials	-0.42)*	Elaborate the *where* frame of an action	***in** inner city Chicago…**by** a seminal study*
(Agentless passives	-0.39)*	Impersonal, detached, focus on patient	*so salient to the **development of** youth*
(Past part postnominal	-0.38)*	Integrates, elaborates (**[which]** = deletion)	*confluence… **[which was]** exacerbated by this*

* Because items in (parentheses) had higher loadings on other dimensions when factors were extracted, even though each loads above the |.35| minimum, none were used in the calculation of dimension 1: *Interpersonal Involvement / Informational Content*. However, they remain of interest. Although this is a fictitious letter I created, it is useful for illustrating traits of an *Informational Content* style of discourse. Unlike the *Interpersonal Involvement* letter, this text intentionally pushes features to a point of hyperbole to illustrate its point. Yet hyperbole seems warranted in light of research showing that fund-raising letters actually tend more this direction, than toward the style illustrated in my *Interpersonal Involvement* sample.
Note. Adapted from Biber, (1988, pp. 102-103 & 221-245).

These formulas marry the hard science of multivariate statistics to the soft art of language analysis to measure narrative.

How a Dimension (Factor) Score is Derived for One Linguistic Feature Within a Single Text

The following illustrates how **one** mean frequency count for **one** feature (which has been normalized to reflect its occurrence per 1,000 words of text) in **one** document is **standardized** to a mean of 0.0 by using the *z-score* formula to determine the **standardized** value for the feature's **normalized** mean.

Six linguistic features on Dimension 2 which mark the presence of narrative focus. (Only *salient* features are listed and Dimension 2 has no negative features.)	Measures in *this text* of each linguistic feature's normalized frequency of occurrence per 1,000 words of text (χ)	Measures in *whole corpus* of each linguistic feature's normalized mean frequency of occurrence per 1,000 words of text (μ)	Measures in *whole corpus* of each Linguistic feature's standard deviation (σ)	*This text's* standardized mean frequency counts, expressed in terms of variance as *z*-scores (z) $\left(z = \frac{\chi - \mu}{\sigma} \right)$
1. Past Tense Verbs	113	40.1	30.4	2.4
2. 3rd Person Personal Pronouns	124	29.9	22.5	4.2
3. Perfect Aspect Verbs	30	8.6	5.2	4.1
4. Public Verbs	14	7.7	5.4	1.5
5. Present Participial Clauses	5	1.0	1.7	2.3
6. Synthetic Negation	3	1.7	1.6	1.4

This Text's **Factor** or **Dimension** Score (the sum of all its **standardized per-thousand mean frequency counts'** *z*- scores):   +15.9

How to apply the *z*-score formula to *just one* linguistic feature in a *Single Text*, so that the count of *that* feature's mean frequency of occurrence-per-thousand words of text, becomes a *standardized measure*

For the **first** linguistic feature listed above (past tense verbs), the normalized mean frequency count of its occurrence per 1,000 words of text (113) is **standardized** by transforming it into a unit of standard deviation, called a *z*-score. This process is illustrated below:

Definition of Terms In the *z*-Score Formula

In the adjacent formula, *z* refers to the standardized *z*- score being sought; χ refers to the normalized frequency (mean-count-per-1,000 words) for the linguistic feature being considered (113 past tense verbs); μ refers to the mean occurrence of past tense verbs in the corpus as **a whole**; and σ is the standard deviation score for past tense verbs in the corpus **as a whole**. The **standardized** mean frequenciy for past tense verbs in this text is found by computing their *z*-score. This process makes possible inter- and intra-corpus comparisons without the skewing long or short texts might create, by translating raw means to units of standard deviation, using the *z*-scores formula.

The formula used below to calculate the **standardized** *mean count-per-thousand-word* occurrence for just **one** linguistic feature (past tense verbs) is also applied above to the **other five** remaining features for the text. This sum for **six linguistic features** (+15.9) is this text's **Factor or Dimension Score**.

$$z = \frac{\chi - \mu}{\sigma} \quad z = \frac{113 - 40.1}{30.4} \quad z = \frac{72.9}{30.4} \quad z = 2.4$$

The standardized score of 2.4 for past tense verbs means that this text has a much higher occurrence of past tense verbs relative to the rest of the corpus: almost 2-1/2 times the mean occurrence of 40.1 per thousand words of text. Biber notes: "This standardized value, reflecting the magnitude of a frequency with respect to the range of possible variation, is a more adequate representation for the purposes of the present study" (1988, p. 95). Summing all of a text's standardized means for all salient linguistic features in any given dimension of variation yields a Factor or Dimension Score for that text on that dimension.

How to apply the *z*-score formula to an *Entire Genre of Texts*, so that the sum of *all* its texts' standardized per-1,000-word mean scores on all salient features yields for each Factor or Dimension, a *Genre-Wide* Score

The procedure above first derives **just one** *z*-score for **just one** *salient linguistic feature* in **just one** *dimension of linguistic variation*. This procedure is then applied to the **remaining five** salient linguistic features in this text. Then the second major step in the procedure involves summing **all** the *standardized scores* for **all six** linguistic features in the text to provide a **Dimension or Factor Score** for **this one text** (e.g. **2.4 + 4.2 + 4.1+ 1.5 + 2.3 + 1.4 = 15.9**). So after standardizing all the count-per-thousand means for **each** salient feature by converting them into *z-scores*, this **Single Text Factor or Dimension Score** is derived by summing those *z-scores*. Here the result is a score that characterizes the degree to which this text is **narrative or non-narrative** (the label for Dimension 2). Computerized analysis of IRS Dickerson IRS 880 Corpus does this for **54** salient linguistic features among **2,412** texts across **five** dimensions of variation, requiring some **130,248** *z-score* computations. Then additional multivariate analyses examine statistical significance. Biber's original research similarly summed *mean scores* for **67** salient linguistic features among **481** texts across **23** genres of written and spoken English. At the heart of the process is the two-step procedure described above (1. standardize to *z-scores*, all per-thousand means for salient features, then 2. sum all those standardized *z-scores* for a text). This process of standardizing mean-per-thousand frequencies to derive a Factor or Dimension Score for **One Text** can be used to produce standardized Factor or Dimension scores for **Entire Genres of Texts**: 1.) First, sum **all Factor or Dimension Scores** for **all the texts** of an **Entire Genre**. Then 2.) divide this total by the **number of texts** in the genre to get a **Genre-Wide** Score. "For example," Biber illustrates, "if there were only three fiction texts, having factor scores for Factor 2 of 16.6, 12.0, and 10.4, the mean score for fiction on Dimension 2 (Factor Score 2) would be: **16.6 + 12.0 + 10.4 ÷ 3 = 13.0**" (1988, p. 95).

Carley's story can be evaluated on 3 dimensions: Rhetorical **Structure**, Linguistic **Substance**, Artistic **Style**.

1. Rhetorical **Structure** (Superstructure of Text)
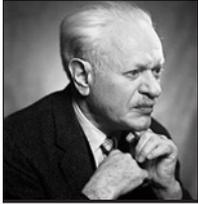
Scholar of rhetoric and literary critic Kenneth Burke believed that all communication was drama. As drama, he believed it could be analyzed from five perspectives— **scene** (the whole context of the action), **act** (what happened), **agent** (those acting), **agency** (the means by which the action occurs), and **motive** (the purpose of the action).

Kenneth Burke

He called this a *dramatistic pentad*. The **scene** of the Carley letter on page 7 is an intimate moment in a Girls and Boys Club that shows a compassionate **act** of empathy—listening. The **agent**, the Club's Leader, reveals that her **motive** is to also **act** as an advocate for one disappointed young girl. In addition to compassionate listening, her **agency** is a direct appeal to a donor through a letter. The *rhetorical superstructure* contains all five elements of Burke's *dramatistic pentad*.

The literature of theatre and film contains better writing models that array in sequential order, elements like those noted above. Among these is a narrative arc or pyramid by Gustav Freytag made of **introduction**, **rising action**, **climax**, **falling action**, and **resolution**.

2. Linguistic **Substance** (Substructure of Text)

But such communication is only as good as the raw materials from which it is built. The table on page 8 lists 23 linguistic features that gave the Carley story its personal, compassionate voice. While the text is artificial, it is a realistic example of how language can **convince** the doubting mind, **touch** the complacent heart, and **move** the reluctant will to give.

The 23 linguistic features in the third column of the table on page 8 created a message designed to **touch** John's heart, **convince** him to cast himself in the role of hero, and thus **move** him to make a contribution.

I call this a *connecting narrative moment* that
• *connects* a reader with someone relatable through a
• *narrative* event that creates empathy, doing so in a
• *moment* of time (a 320-word text or 60-second read).

But the story doesn't suffocate the ask. It fulfills its fund-raising purpose by ending with a direct appeal.

Unlike *Help Ameliorate Economic Asymmetry*, which uses highly informational linguistic features, the Carley letter uses *personal verbs* to express feelings, it uses *present tense* to depict unfolding drama, and contractions to create a conversational flow. A *perfect past aspect verb* structure portrays dramatic tension: "Carley had been turning her face." The big difference between these artificially created letters is that one **tells** us about a family's economic stress while the other **shows** us that stress in a warm, one-minute mini drama about Carley.

3. Artistic **Style** (Infrastructure of Text)

In her book *Talking Voices*, Georgetown linguist Deborah Tannen identifies four stylistic devices: *clarity, repetition, dialogue,* and *vivid imagery* that I call these **elements of artistic style**. They make a text interesting.

These elements separate the average writer from the good and the good from the extraordinary. The Carley letter opens with us listening to a *dialogue* filled with *vivid images*. Carley asks about camp: *"are there bears and what's ah Sa-more?"* And its prose is clear and simple: subject > verb > object form. University of Chicago's Joseph Williams shows this in a famous tale:

Complex: "Once upon a time, as a walk through the woods was taking place on the part of Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf's jump out from behind a tree occurred, causing her fright."

Simple: "Once upon a time, Little Red Riding Hood was walking through the woods, when the Wolf jumped out from behind a tree and frightened her."

Some wonder if the highly informational style my study found in fund appeals is due to similarity of backgrounds among nonprofit leaders. The more specific explanation is that they had similar teachers.

In their formal education, they had been taught to write in an abstract, detached, style which diminished narrative and rewarded analytic discourse.

Cultural linguist Walter Ong, a protégé of Marshall McLuhan, believed such detached discourse was evidence of a cultural shift from *orality* to *literacy*. He traced that shift over the millennia, citing examples of *orality* in epic

Walter Ong

poems like *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and in the stories of *David and Goliath, The Good Samaritan*. Then Gutenberg bought with his innovation of printing, the epoch of literacy and the agency of fundamental change.

That agency of change, according to Ong, was the result of wide-spread knowledge that the printing of books enabled. The printed word changed how we produced and processed knowledge. He observed that oral cultures depicted *agonism* (e.g. the *agony* of people in conflict). The discourses of these pre-literate cultures were filled with scene, plot, characters, tension and resolution—the stuff of stories. Printing, in contrast, fostered abstractions that disengaged knowledge from the arena where human beings in daily-life struggled.

The writing of marketers, public relations, and fund-raising professionals tends toward an oral mode of discourse, even though their language is eventually reduced to the printed page or screen. Professionals in these fields tend to write like people talk. Thus, a good fund-raising text will tend to read like the banter of friends discussing something they care about over a cup of coffee—filled with narrative and emotion.

More than 30 years ago a colleague at a non-profit I worked for told me she had spent the entire week writing a fund appeal. I'm sure I insulted her as I laughed and said dismissively: "Carol, I could have done that in an hour!" I was both naïve and rude.

In my research, a discussion with another woman deepened my respect for the process of writing. Author of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood, told me another Canadian author named Margaret—Margaret

Margaret Atwood Laurence—would often share this "old writer's joke" with those who think writing is easy:

"A man sits next to Margaret at a Toronto banquet. He introduces himself, then asks: *'What do you do, Margaret?'* She replies: *'I'm a writer.'* The man responds with enthusiasm: *'Really! When I retire I'm going to become a writer too.'* Margaret reciprocates, asking: *'And what do you do, sir?'* He replies: *'I'm a neurosurgeon.'* With a twinkle in her eye, Margaret shoots back: *'How interesting, I always thought that when I retire, I'd take up brain surgery!'*"

Margaret's acerbic reply frames how we think about writing: *we don't*. We take it for granted. While we use language to engage in discourse on any number of subjects, we seldom give it much thought. And when we do think about writing, we're more concerned with how

to avoid the embarrassment of flubbing up on some rule of grammar, punctuation, or word choice than we are with the real task of writing: *to communicate effectively*.

The rules of grammar and lexis merely reflect common language patterns at a point in time. And as those patterns change over time, so change the rules that govern them. So, while language rules matter in academia, what matters more in fund raising and daily life is understanding and writing in three *dimensions* or *domains* of language.

1. Rhetorical Structure *(Superstructure)*

As architect Louis Henri Sullivan, known as the father of skyscrapers in late 19th century Chicago, wrote: "form ever follows function." So like one who builds a house, the first question a writer asks is, what *kind* of text do I want build? For fund-raising, it must:

1.) Focus on *people* versus abstract concepts
2.) Tell the story of a person *emblematic* of your cause
3.) Ensure that the story does not *camouflage* the cause
4.) Ensure that the story does not *suffocate* the ask

2. Linguistic Substance *(Substructure)*

Like a contractor who builds a house with the raw materials of wood, wire, and pipe, a writer builds a text with words, grammar, and narrative. A fund appeal should apply the linguistic features used in the *Help Send Carley to Camp* letter. Avoid the obtuse style of *Help Ameliorate Socio-Economic Asymmetry* in favor of a less arrogant and more compassionate *voice*.

3. Artistic Style *(Infrastructure)*

Language is the bridge that connects us to others through what we write or say. But it's more than the sum of its rhetorical structure and linguistic parts. A fund-raising narrative contains elements of artistic style that grab and keep attention. Lincoln's Gettysburg address is chock-full of artful repetition, vivid imagery, and clarity—a model of artistic style.

To change writing habits is no easy task. None of us want to learn more tedious grammar rules. What's far more important than grammar is learning to bend writing to the constraining goals imposed by the three dimensions of language. *That's* what truly matters. *That's* what will maximize funds raised for a cause.

Call me to learn more about how you can offer a narrative fund-raising course: 909-864-2798.

Resources on the Language of Fund Raising

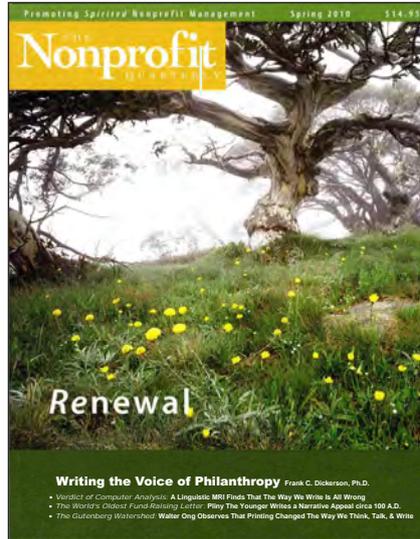(Note: All resources may be downloaded from the articles tab of www.TheWrittenVoice.org)
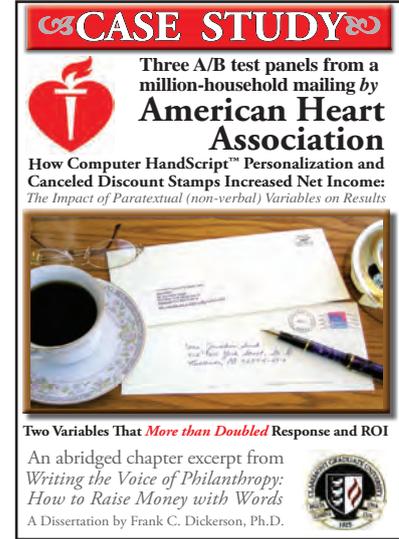
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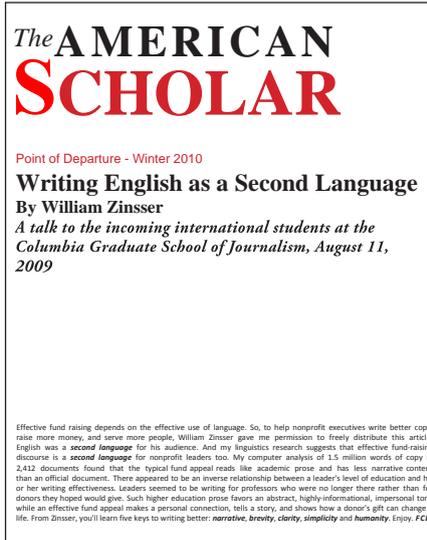
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About the Author
Frank C. Dickerson, Ph.D.

I fell into fund raising in 1969 as president of a student organization my freshman year at The Ohio State University. I felt I had been tricked, since the job description said nothing about having to raise funds.

But as a communication major I enjoyed the process and ended up making a career of it.

Eventually I helped lead development at an international NGO that now raises $700 million annually. I left that job to go into consulting.

I earned my BA at Ohio State, an MA at The International School of Theology, an MBA at Pepperdine, and a PhD from Claemont Graduate University. In my career I have trained thousands both how to write fund-raising copy and how to ask individuals to support a cause in face-to-face visits.

If I can help you, feel free to contact me.

Frank C. Dickerson

Research Site
www.TheWrittenVoice.org

Writing Workshop
www.NarrativeFundRaising.org

Fund Raising Service
www.HighTouchCommunication.com

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