

Pretenders to the Steward Throne

Barriers to the adoption of 'stewardship' in UK fundraising



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Abstract and executive summary

'Stewardship' is the new buzzword. Everyone is talking about it, yet it raises more questions than it answers. This White Paper sets out to clarify some of the confusions around the term stewardship, exploring:

- Different notions of stewardship.
- The differences between stewardship, and donor care and relationship fundraising.
- US notions of stewardship as they relate to planned giving.
- Different types of fundraising stewardship – including the idea of 'third level stewardship', which sits above and encompasses relationship fundraising and is a notion of stewardship that is not yet practised or aspired to by British fundraisers.

The White Paper then identifies nine barriers to the adoption and take-up of stewardship among UK charities:

1. What does stewardship actually mean?
2. British or American style stewardship?
3. There is no common understanding of stewardship in a fundraising context.
4. Bandwagon jumping.
5. Low standards of donor care could undermine stewardship.
6. Measurement – KPIs (key performance indicators) and benchmarks are needed to assess the impact of stewardship.
7. Is stewardship a means or an end?
8. Training/continuous personal development (CPD) issues.
9. Lack of will for stewardship to succeed.

Finally, this White Paper concludes by calling on the Institute of Fundraising in the UK to set up a working party to develop a code of practice on fundraising stewardship that will introduce a definition of stewardship that can be used as a benchmark for all fundraisers.

Introduction

Suddenly everyone is talking about stewardship. The NSPCC has started working with specialist charity marketing agency Cascaid on its stewardship of donors (2007). The term is appearing in surveys and in the trade press. It is being bandied about and dropped into conversations seemingly without any clear definition or context about how it sits within the scheme of charity fundraising in the UK.

However, there is more heat than light with the sudden emergence of this new term – and I say ‘term’ rather than ‘new method’ because it is arguable that stewardship has been with us for a long time under a different name. It is arguable; but I disagree.

This sudden introduction of the term stewardship into the fundraising lexicon has left a trail of unanswered questions in its wake.

- What is stewardship?
- How is it, if at all, different from donor care?
- How is it, if at all, different from relationship fundraising?
- Is what we mean by stewardship the same as what American fundraisers mean by stewardship?

Perhaps even more important than any of these is the question: is there actually a need for stewardship? This is outside the scope of this White Paper, but I sincerely hope that it will form a significant part of the debate. Stewardship may not be appropriate for all charities and the decision to implement a stewardship programme should come from a genuine need – from the top down – rather than be shoehorned in from the bottom up so that the whole fundraising strategy is reshaped around a possibly inappropriate stewardship programme. Just because we can steward, it doesn't mean that we should.

Unless we can answer these questions, and arrive at a common understanding of what stewardship is – or should be – in a British fundraising context, then we face the prospect that fundraisers in this country will not adopt stewardship. Instead, there is a real possibility that ‘stewardship’ will become synonymous with and interchangeable with ‘donor care’ and relationship’ fundraising. This in turn will lead to a round of bandwagon jumping as charities adopt the term as a fashion accessory and consultancies and agencies adopt it for competitive advantage, where in truth neither will be practising anything of the sort.

So unless we can answer these questions, identify what stewardship means and identify and overcome potential barriers to stewardship, then we will be left with a situation a couple of years hence where the term stewardship is in common usage but to all intents and purposes the practice of fundraising is totally unchanged from the way it is today.

What is stewardship?

The Oxford English Dictionary describes stewardship as:

'... personal responsibility for taking care of another person's property or financial affairs.'

We can adapt this definition to fundraising/philanthropy.

Fundraising stewardship notion 1

'Stewardship is personal responsibility for taking care of another person's philanthropy or charitable giving.'

This would suggest that stewardship involves a fundraiser taking responsibility for another person's charitable giving. This notion of fundraising stewardship will be important when considering the differences between relationship fundraising and stewardship.

Wikipedia also talks about 'environmental stewardship'.

'Environmental stewardship is the responsibility to take care of our natural resources to ensure that they are sustainably managed for current and future generations. Stewardship is an ethic that embodies cooperative planning and management of environmental resources with organizations, communities and others to actively engage in the prevention of loss of habitat and facilitate its recovery in the interest of long-term sustainability (Fisheries and Oceans Canada - 'Stewardship in Action' program).' (Ibid).

Again, we can adapt this definition to charities:

Fundraising stewardship notion 2

'Philanthropic stewardship is the responsibility to take care of the potential pool of charitable donations and charity donors to ensure this resource is sustainably managed for current and future generations. Stewardship is an ethic that embodies cooperative planning and management of philanthropic resources with organisations, communities and others to actively engage in the prevention of donor attrition, loss of public trust and confidence, and the continued desire of the public to support charities in the interest of long-term sustainability.'

This second notion of philanthropy is very different to the first. Notion 1 is very much about an individual fundraiser's responsibility to an individual donor. Notion 2 concerns the responsibility of all fundraisers not just to all donors but moreover their responsibility to sustain 'charitable giving' as something that exists external to individual donors.

Again this notion of stewardship will be important when we come to compare fundraising stewardship with relationship fundraising.

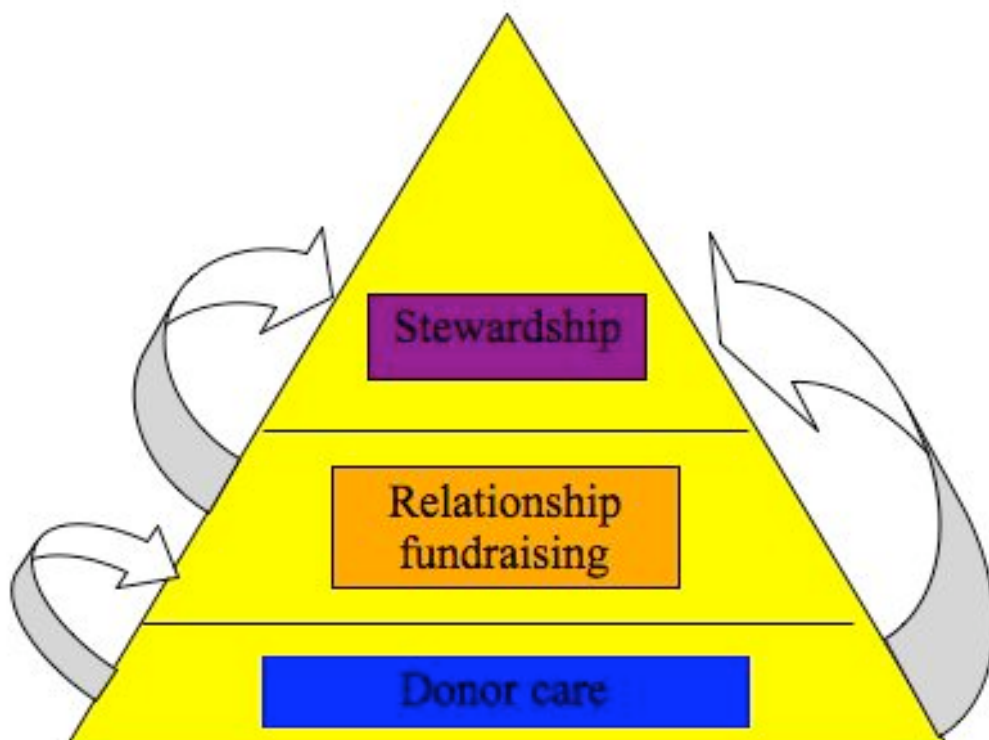
This idea of stewardship as responsibility towards the sustainability of the resource is reinforced by the definition of stewardship made by the Falkland Centre for Stewardship.

'We understand stewardship as the act and art of holding, nurturing and vitalising assets for others – including the next generation. The asset in question may be an organisation, a tradition, a building, a landscape, or at the highest level the planet's natural resources and ecosystem. For us stewardship is about responsible, long-term management. Good stewards draw from the past, mind the future and always look beyond themselves.' (www.centreforstewardship.org.uk)

Charitable giving would easily fit with this definition as an asset that should be 'nurtured and vitalised' for the next generation.

Donor care and relationship fundraising v stewardship

The central point here is that donor care, relationship fundraising, and stewardship sit in the stewardship hierarchy where higher levels incorporate lower levels



- Stewardship incorporates both relationship fundraising and donor care.
- Relationship fundraising incorporates donor care.

This means that donor care is part of relationship fundraising; and both donor care and relationship fundraising are components of stewardship. But individually they are only components; they are not the same thing.

So, to stress the point:

- All donor care is part of stewardship but not all stewardship is donor care.
- All relationship fundraising is part of stewardship but not all stewardship is relationship fundraising.

So, what is donor care and why does it not qualify on its own as the totality of stewardship?

What is donor care?

Donor care is the practicalities that underlie relationship fundraising and stewardship. Donor care is data-driven. Donor care is about ensuring that you have:

- A clean, de-duped database.
- Your donors' addresses and appellations recorded correctly.
- Up-to-date payment methods.
- Up-to-date giving history.
- Communication preferences, i.e. email, telephone, mail.

Donor care is the principle that underlies the two higher levels in the stewardship hierarchy. Without getting this right, it is impossible to practise relationship fundraising or stewardship. How will you be able to build a relationship with a donor if you continually address her as 'Miss' when she is married? How will you be able to steward a donor's gifts if you've got his email address wrong so your reports keep bouncing back?

But it is obvious in comparing donor care with the two notions of fundraising stewardship that donor care can, on its own, satisfy neither. We cannot assume responsibility for a donor's philanthropy simply by getting her name right; neither can we protect public trust and confidence in fundraising just by ensuring no donor is mailed twice (though it is a start).

Donor care on its own is not stewardship.

US notions of fundraising stewardship

Before moving on to comparing stewardship with relationship fundraising, we need to go back a step and explore the US origins of the term stewardship in relation to philanthropy.

In the USA, where stewardship originated, it has been intimately linked with 'planned giving', whereby an officer of a non-profit organisation or an external consultant will help a wealthy donor identify the best financial schemes and methods of giving to charity that will benefit financially the donor as well (Sargeant, 2002). Planned giving specialists in the USA are therefore very much akin to financial advisors and planned giving products in the USA include charitable gift annuities, deferred payment gift annuities, pooled income funds and charitable remainder unitrusts (ibid p19).

Sargeant says, 'Fundraising professionals in America spend a great deal of time and effort guiding donors through the maze of available options.' (Ibid, p17.)

And, 'In the USA, the broadened conception of stewardship...supports acceptance and use of a wide range of financial services products as an integral part of the philanthropic process...It explicitly integrates a core understanding of the fundraising development process with the financial services products themselves.' (Ibid, p17-18.)

This is clearly stewardship as it accords with notion 1 as a fundraiser's duty to take responsibility for an individual donor's charitable giving and indeed Sargeant says that this, '...builds upon long-established concepts of philanthropy and stewardship that have been central to the development of American committed giving programmes for more than 100 years.' (Ibid.)

However, Sargeant then goes on to describe an integration of this planned giving stewardship – stewardship of the gift – with stewardship of the donor, i.e. the donor's values and intentions.

This first type of US stewardship is very, very unfamiliar to British fundraisers because we simply do not have a US-style financial/philanthropic set-up that allows for planned giving. The Giving Campaign produced a report in 2003 called 'Charity Financial Products – a New Approach to Giving', which outlined the types of products that could be launched in the UK (Thomas, 2003); while the Institute of Fundraising and the Charities Aid Foundation set up the Lifetime Legacies Coalition in 2004 to lobby for a change in legislation to allow these products to be developed in the UK. But with no political will on either side of the House of Commons for such legislative change, US-style planned giving is a dead end in the UK.

However, the second type of stewardship – stewardship of the donor – begins to look more familiar.

There are many guides to fundraising to be found on American websites. One in particular serves as a useful example – Californian organisation BikeOnTours, which runs a fundraising consultancy. This features a section on fundraising that has three parts: planned giving, donor stewardship and internet fundraising.

www.bikeontours.on.ca/fundev.htm#stewardship

The planned giving section is very much a mechanical, hands-on guide to financial products and setting up and running a planned giving programme. The donor stewardship section follows immediately and appears to be intended as applying to the donors using planned giving.

These are just two of its comments:

- Poor donor stewardship treats donors as checkbooks [sic], not as people who share an interest in your cause.
- Raising money by organizing the next special event or preparing the next mass mailing for donations takes priority over taking the time to get longer-term benefits from existing donors.

It then offers several 'components of good donor stewardship. These include:

- An immediate letter of acknowledgment and thanks.
- A telephone thank you, by a volunteer board member if possible.
- Soliciting for feedback and answering questions from donors.
- Telling the donor how her last donation was used before asking [for another donation].

These are all very familiar; so familiar in fact that we immediately recognise them as 'components of good relationship fundraising'. In fact, even though Ken Burnett's *Relationship Fundraising* isn't included in the BikeOnTours bibliography, all the points included as components of good stewardship are to be found in Burnett's seminal book, which was first published in 1992 (Burnett, 2002).

While American stewardship as it deals with planned giving (stewardship of the gift) is very different to what British fundraisers understand by stewardship, American stewardship of the donor is virtually indistinguishable from British relationship fundraising.

Relationship fundraising v stewardship

The concept of relationship fundraising is well established in the UK.

Relationship fundraising is about putting the needs and values of the donor at the heart of what you do as a fundraiser. The subtitle of Ken Burnett's book says it all – 'A donor-based approach to the business of raising money'. The theory is that a fundraiser will increase the amount given and the lifetime value of a donor by building a genuine relationship with him or her.

And yet current talk of stewardship in the UK certainly implies that it is a lot more than good old relationship fundraising under a different name, although there is certainly confusion as to what it means. Mark Philips of creative agency Bluefrog

says, 'I don't see what's new about it. Any organisation that doesn't already want to involve its donors is crazy.' (Hoffbrand, 2007.)

Part of this confusion arises because the concept of relationship fundraising has also been widely misunderstood and relationship fundraising has not been practised particularly well.

Ken Burnett himself has admitted that the phrase 'relationship fundraising' is almost certainly unhelpful and that he should have limited himself to the subtitle of the book – 'A donor based approach to the business of raising money'. (Burnett, 2003, p16.)

In the same article, Burnett says, 'Why is it that so many people appear to have difficulty in understanding what relationship fundraising is all about? Why do so many people seem to think they practise it when rather obviously they don't?' (Ibid.)

The upshot of this is that when a new, revised version of relationship-fundraising such as stewardship appears, a lot of people still haven't got their heads around the original concept so it is hard to understand the new one and how it is actually new.

But this is only part of the problem. At its core, there is still insufficient daylight between stewardship as a new concept in fundraising and relationship fundraising for people to notice a significant difference.

The NSPCC is the first charity in the country to set up a stewardship department (Rigby, 2007). NSPCC's deputy director of fundraising, Tim Hunter, has said that the NSPCC was introduced to the idea of donor stewardship by American fundraising consultant and stewardship expert Karen Osborne.

Hunter says, 'A central plank of her approach to stewardship is the need for someone within your fundraising department to have specific responsibility for it. It is their job to make sure all donors are getting thanked, acknowledged and the right level of feedback about what their donation has made possible.

'This person, or in the NSPCC's case, this team, doesn't have a fundraising target. Instead they work alongside fundraisers to make sure the donor experience is as good as it can possibly be by making them feel that their gift has been recognised and valued.' (Hunter, 2007.)

And yet this still looks like relationship fundraising but without a fundraising target. In fact, I'd say it has more in common with a commercial customer relations department. The stewardship team at the NSPCC is responsible for ensuring that the good components of relationship fundraising are adhered to. Is stewardship, therefore, merely the enforcement of relationship fundraising?

Now is the time to go back to our two notions of fundraising stewardship.

Fundraising stewardship notion 1

'Stewardship is personal responsibility for taking care of another person's philanthropy or charitable giving.'

Fundraising stewardship notion 2

'Philanthropic stewardship is the responsibility to take care of the potential pool of charitable donations and charity donors to ensure this resource is sustainably managed for current and future generations.'

Does the NSPCC's stewardship programme meet either of these criteria?

It does not conform to notion 1, as the NSPCC stewardship team does not accept personal responsibility for an individual donor's charitable giving.

If it is to be anything more than relationship fundraising enforcement, it seems to have more in common with notion 2: that by ensuring that fundraisers adhere to best relationship fundraising practice, that will ensure sustainability of the pool of donors and donations for NSPCC into the future. The stewardship team in this sense can be viewed as conservationists, putting measures in place to ensure a common resource is sustainably managed.

But we do arrive at a strict definitional problem. What the NSPCC is doing is innovative and different and it will no doubt have a huge impact on their fundraising. But, as defined, it is not stewardship of an individual, it is stewardship of a resource; it is not stewardship of one donor; it is stewardship of all donors taken together.

Third level fundraising stewardship

It would be possible to stop this paper here by saying, 'Why does this matter?' Just because what fundraisers mean by stewardship isn't actually the dictionary definition of stewardship, what's the problem? It is still something new and something that will improve fundraising.

The problem is that if we call this form of stewardship 'stewardship', then where do we actually go from here – assuming that there is a need to go there? If we do want to practice dictionary definition, notion-1-type fundraising stewardship, what will we call it? But more importantly, if we already think we are practicing stewardship, will we even look for that next level if we think we are already on it?

Relationship fundraising is about devolving power to the donor. It's about letting donors choose how much they give and when; it's about letting them decide how often they want you to communicate with them and by what media. It puts the donor in control and then measures how happy they are with that devolution of control

through customer satisfaction surveys and the like.

Stewardship is to some extent an opposite of that. With genuine stewardship, you take the onus and control away from the donor and take it upon yourself. That is what is meant by notion 1 fundraising stewardship and it is closer to the original American planned giving model than we had realised.

There is another level that fundraising can move up to and that will be real stewardship of donor and gift. American stewardship has always been focused on major givers, whether it is through planned giving or stewardship-as-relationship fundraising (see for instance Santicola, 2007).

The next level of fundraising stewardship, the level that sits above and encompasses relationship fundraising would be 'third level fundraising stewardship' (after level 1, donor care; and level 2, relationship fundraising).

Karen Osborne says that stewardship is, '...more than sending out a thank-you note. The thank-you is just, "this is what we promise to do with your money." Stewardship is, "this is in fact what we did with your money." It's the delivery on the promise.' (Ibid.)

But even this falls short of what we can expect with third level stewardship.

Third level fundraising stewardship starts where relationship fundraising and its enforcement begins, but it goes beyond just enforcement and evaluation of relationship fundraising. The fundraising steward, in conjunction with the major donor fundraiser, seeks to identify, as Americans do with stewardship, those donors that have the capacity to give greater amounts and for longer. The major donor fundraiser will of course bring those potential donors into the major gifts programme.

At some stage, third-level stewardship kicks in and the ultimate goal of third level stewardship is to have a donor say to a major donor and/or fundraising steward, 'You know what types of project I want to support, you know how I want to be kept informed, you know what kind of outcomes I expect to achieve, here's my £500,000, I trust you, use this as you see fit.'

The charity is now really stewarding that donor's gift. That's the stage we really want to arrive at, the stage where someone is confident enough to hand over a substantial sum of money and let the charity use it.

As so often turns out to be the case, Ken Burnett was ahead of us all. Fifteen years ago in *Relationship Fundraising*, Burnett said, 'Think of your fundraising role as that of a double agent, providing a service to two different markets – the donor and the cause.' (Burnett, 2002, p27.)

The fundraising steward will be that double agent because, although employed by the charity, he or she will be the donor's representative, whom the donor trusts, in the charity, ensuring that his gift is used according to his wishes. This means that the fundraising steward must have the authority to make demands on the rest of the organisation.

She must also have the authority to request and receive information on project outcomes from the service delivery department and question them if the gift does not appear to be being put to good use.

She must also be entitled to act as *in loco* donor. The relationship between a stewardship officer and a donor will be an intimate one, with the steward understanding all the donor's interests and philanthropic ambitions and the donor trusting the steward to help him achieve them. Suppose say, a donor had indicated to his stewardship officer that he wanted to give to a certain project and had instructed the steward to start making arrangements for the gift. However, suppose say, a different funding opportunity suddenly cropped up that the steward knew would appeal more to the donor, who, for the sake of argument and this example, is now incommunicado on an expedition to the Amazon. The steward would have the authority to start making arrangements to direct the gift to the alternative project, because a) she has been entrusted with the responsibility to make such a decision and b) she knows that this is the decision the donor would make if he knew about it.

This dual role, this independence, means that stewardship must be independent of fundraising so that it can enforce relationship fundraising, as it does at the NSPCC, and ensure the gift is being used in accordance with the donor's wishes. (We can see here that there is yet another dichotomy: that of stewardship as a principle, which all fundraisers should be working under; and stewardship as a job description, which is the preserve of the stewardship department.)

It also means that third level stewardship is something that kicks in only when donors have been identified as potential long-term high-level givers. Just as not all donors can be put on to a major giving programme, neither can all donors be put on a stewardship programme, at least not real stewardship. Not all donors want a relationship and not all donors want stewarding (see 'supporter journeys', below).

Theresa Lloyd's 2004 book *Why Rich People Give* contained a series of recommendations that were third level stewardship in all but name, including assigning an 'account manager' to every major donor, putting major donors on the board, and ensuring staff at all levels give 'effective time to nurturing relationships with potential and actual major donors'. (Lloyd, 2004, p307.)

This is true notion 1 fundraising stewardship. Whether this is actually feasible or even desirable in UK fundraising remains to be seen.

But it is important that we look at how far we can take stewardship of both the donor and the gift and to do that we need to keep that level open and not conflate the term 'stewardship' with variants of relationship fundraising.

Stewardship and supporter journeys

Before we conclude this first section of the White Paper, I want to take a brief divergence into the idea of supporter journeys. Supporter journeys is the idea that supporters of a charity have a lot more than one way to support and that from the moment they become involved, whether by signing a petition or signing a direct debit, there should be a clear communications programme illuminating several clear paths that this supporter could take through the organisation.

Friends of the Earth has adopted such a programme, which it calls the 'Wheel of Involvement', and FoE has identified 74 different ways a person can support them (Ruderham, 2007).

It is arguable – very arguable in fact – that this is a form of stewardship, although FoE's head of supporter development, Ruth Ruderham, does not use the word at all in her article in *Professional Fundraising*, which describes the 'wheel of involvement' (ibid). I am not disputing that this could indeed be what fundraisers should regard as stewardship or that it will be what they come to regard as stewardship. It would also fit with both definitions of philanthropic stewardship that I outlined at the start.

There is yet another dichotomous analogy we can use here, drawing on another definition of stewardship and stewarding. 'Stewards' are employed at sports and music events to ensure the event runs smoothly. There are two ways you could steward people attending these events.

First, like you see at sports grounds such as Hampden Park, Glastonbury and The Oval, there are lots of people in green and yellow tabards shepherding people through turnstiles and keeping them away from certain areas. This is one form of event stewardship.

But consider this as an alternative. Your assigned event steward arranges your tickets and seating options and ensures that they are delivered to you. Your steward arranges your transport to the event on the day and personally guides you into the event and to your seats. She/he then provides you with relevant programmes and serves you lunch and tea during the intervals. Now that is 'Stewardship' with a capital S.

I argue that supporter journeys should be seen in this way. You have 10,000 supporters on your database, all of whom have the potential to engage with you in more than one way. However, some will want to be shepherded through the turnstiles while others will want you to provide a taxi and lunch (while others won't want to go at all).

Stewardship is not a one-size fits all solution and third level stewardship could easily encompass taking those supporters *who want to be taken* on their supporter journeys. But I reiterate that stewardship is not something that can be applied as a mass marketing practice because not all supporters want to be stewarded.

Summary to first section

In the first section of the White Paper, I have argued that:

- Stewardship as a fundraising concept originated in the USA in reference to planned giving, which is not applicable to the UK.
- Stewardship as practised in the USA now by the likes of Karen Osborne is virtually identical to what British fundraisers understand by relationship fundraising.
- Our two notions of stewardship imply that it should be more than warmed-over donor care and relationship fundraising and 'third level stewardship' would mean taking personal responsibility for a person's philanthropic support to a charity over and above ensuring the 'enforcement' of good relationship fundraising principles.
- This third level stewardship could encompass supporter journeys.

Nine barriers to stewardship

So what are the barriers to the adoption of stewardship in UK fundraising? Irrespective of whether third level stewardship is a realistic aspiration, there are barriers to adopting putative stewardship programmes in the UK. Some of these fall out of the discussion of stewardship above; others are discussed for the first time.

Barrier 1 – what does stewardship actually mean: notion 1 or notion 2 stewardship?

So as fundraisers, the first barrier to overcome when we talk about stewardship is: Are we using notion 1 – our responsibility to individual donors; or are we using notion 2 – our responsibility to sustaining the resource of charitable giving? It is easy to switch between the two different meanings and this is what has happened in the USA where stewardship is essentially the same as UK relationship fundraising.

Barrier 2 – British or American stewardship?

This is unlikely to be a major problem as the US notions of planned giving are not applicable in this country to any great degree. However, it would do well to bear in mind that there are two different ideas of stewardship operating in the USA.

Barrier 3 – lack of clear understanding of what stewardship is

If we don't understand what type of stewardship we are referring to (notion 1 or notion 2), if we don't know now whether it is a British or American concept we are using, if we don't know what relationship fundraising really is and how that differs from stewardship, then how on earth will fundraisers be able to implement a stewardship programme if neither they nor anyone else can tell them in a sentence of fewer than 30 words what it is?

Barrier 4 – bandwagon jumping

Barriers 1, 2, 3, but especially 3, lead to barrier 4 – bandwagon jumping. If we are unable to say precisely what stewardship is, then conversely, we cannot say what it isn't either. We leave ourselves open to the possibility – even probability – that many commercial operators will claim to offer a stewardship service when they are really offering warmed-over donor care. Also, as stewardship is the new buzzword, charities will not feel fully equipped without a stewardship officer although what they are doing will probably fall far short of stewardship. Meanwhile, organisations striving for genuine stewardship will find their message and medium lost in the noise and interference generated by all this faux-stewardship.

Barrier 5 – standards of donor care

Standards of donor care are still, at times, lamentable among British charities. Data-driven donor care underpins all types of fundraising and relationship fundraising cannot function effectively without it. Unless charities have effective and reliable databases and the resources to maintain them, then all pretensions to stewardship could be completely undermined by a simple spelling mistake on a letter to a major donor.

Barrier 6 – measurement

The whole point of fundraising, despite some objections from within this sector, is to raise money. And the whole point of stewardship is to allow you to raise more money from your donors over a longer period of time.

Roger Lawson, now with marketing agency Cascaid but formerly of WWF, says that fundraisers should measure two things: 1) the amount of money they raise, compared to what they spend; 2) everything that will impact on how much you can raise in the future, which includes the relationships you have with donors (Lawson, 2003, p20).

Building a relationship is hard to quantify and measure and Lawson goes on to say that the most important measurement of a relationship is how satisfied the donor is with your organisation (ibid p22).

But what is important for both relationship fundraising and stewardship is how can you measure the value of the relationship in a currency that is interchangeable with

donated income? In other words, how can you take a customer satisfaction survey that shows satisfaction levels at, say, 3.9 compared to 3.7 last year and be able to say that this will relate to £XX,000 extra income?

Stewardship, in all its forms will need to develop KPIs and benchmarks. NSPCC's stewardship-as-relationship fundraising policy already has performance targets, and will no doubt be able to relate these to the amount of money raised.

But if we are talking about third level stewardship – either as a supporter journey manager or as a very major donor programme – there will need to be a different, bespoke set of KPIs and benchmarks that show how stewardship of the donor produces more money than non-stewarded donors. This is worthy of a research programme of its own and Ruth Ruderham at Friends of the Earth is working on such measurements (Ruderham, 2007, p26; *The Gift*, 2007, p1). It should be something that is a priority for anyone concerned with taking relationship fundraising forward.

Failure to be able to measure and quantify the effects of stewardship may prove to be one of the biggest barriers to its advancement and widespread adoption.

Barrier 7 – is stewardship a means or end?

I said when discussing barrier 6 that, 'the whole point of stewardship is to allow you to raise more money. I see that as an undeniable fact of life, in just the same way that the whole point of relationship fundraising is to build relationships that will generate larger and more sustained giving.'

This means that stewardship (as is relationship fundraising) is a means to an end, not the end in itself. However, many fundraisers have seen relationship fundraising as an end in itself (MacQuillin, 2003). And as I discussed earlier, even Ken Burnett has said that the title of his book may have been unhelpful (Burnett 2003, p16).

If the principle of stewardship (rather than the job role of the fundraising steward) – which has no clear definition – comes to be seen as an end in itself, rather than a means to raising greater, more sustainable gifts, we face the same barrier that has plagued relationship fundraising. Fundraisers will see their job as 'stewarding' (in the loosest, undefined sense) donors unrelated to how much money that stewarding raises.

Without a commonly-accepted definition or understanding of stewardship (barriers 1, 2 and 3) and a way to measure stewardship (barrier 6), this is the scenario we face: a future generation of fundraisers proclaiming that, 'My job is not just to raise money; it's to steward donors on their support journeys.'

However, independent stewardship, of the kind envisioned by the NSPCC, *is* an end in itself. Although these stewards work closely with fundraisers, they are not

fundraisers and their job is not to raise money (though I would argue they are more a customer relations department than stewards). Once again, this shows the vital importance of understanding which notion and which nuance of stewardship we are talking about.

Barrier 8 – CPD (continuous professional development)/training issues

So, if you got a job as a fundraising stewardship officer, what would you do on your first day in the office? Good question. Stewardship is an emerging, embryonic discipline with no real body of practice to draw upon. In a sense, we are going to be making this up as we go along.

Some of the issues we face are:

- Stewardship needs continuity – so the high staff turnover in fundraising departments is an issue.
- Shortage of major donor fundraisers in the UK who could be expected to progress to a stewardship role.
- Very little, if any, CPD/training in UK relates to stewardship.
- There is no best practice guidance.

Barrier 9 – laziness

Many great, new ideas fall by the wayside in this sector. My biggest worry is that, with eight barriers to overcome, we make think it is all too difficult and in five or 10 years from now, we will remember ‘stewardship’ as a fad from the mid-noughties because we couldn’t be bothered to put in the time and trouble to make it work.

Conclusion

Fundraising stewardship is an idea that is riddled with dichotomies:

- Stewardship of the donor or stewardship of the gift?
- Stewardship of an individual or stewardship of the giving pool?
- British or American stewardship?
- Stewardship as a principle or stewardship as a job description?
- Stewardship v relationship fundraising.
- Stewardship v donor care.

One further, final, dichotomy inherent in ideas of stewardship is that it is not rocket science in principle and yet quite difficult in practice, in no small part because of the barriers I have identified in this paper.

We therefore have to set about dismantling those barriers and the lead in this has to be taken by the Institute of Fundraising.

We need a working party that will develop a code of practice on fundraising stewardship, just like we have codes of practice on other types of fundraising

techniques (though relationship fundraising is conspicuous by its absence among Institute of Fundraising codes of practice).

This code of practice must contain a commonly accepted notion of what is meant by stewardship in fundraising in a UK context. This is not meant to suggest that all fundraisers in the UK must comply with this definition. This is a free country and they can practice anything they want and call it stewardship. However, it would allow charities to compare the 'stewardship' offerings of a consultant with a benchmark of what stewardship ought to be.

This will require a widespread consultation and a national, maybe international, conference on stewardship with some of the best thinkers in the world contributing to it.

If stewardship is to become an accepted and respected part of the fundraising process, then following a common definition and the development of key performance indicators (KPIs), best practice guidelines and dedicated stewardship training programmes must follow. But if they are to contribute in a significant way to our understanding of stewardship, it is essential they address the issues raised in this paper and not simply serve up warmed-over relationship fundraising.

Of all the barriers identified in this paper, the most important is the lack of a common understanding of what stewardship is. Without this, I fear that genuine stewardship will wither on the vine, while 'stewardship' becomes just another name for donor care and relationship fundraising.

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Gordon Michie

So am I the Young Pretender or the rightful heir to the stewardship throne? Is the true king donor care or is it relationship fundraising, or is the true king stewardship and why do I have a right to comment on it?

Over the last 10 years I have been privileged to work throughout North America, Europe and the UK with many of the world’s leading global brands and leading charities in a variety of countries. The majority of the last 10 years has been spent spearheading the development of face-to-face acquisition into these market places. During this time it became obvious to me that acquisition is not the be all and end all to fundraising.

Yes it is a very important foundation to allow our organisations to grow and develop, but the Holy Grail of sustainability can only come through the issues that this paper tries to decipher. The development of donor care and relationship fundraising strategies must be at the core of the thought process when considering our acquisition programmes and occasionally, through lack of time, lack of investment or sheer lack of understanding this does not happen. This therefore leads to many of the barriers to good stewardship and is ultimately what precludes us from finding the true heir to the stewardship throne.

We can see from what has been written in the past (and probably what will be written in the future) that there is a lot of talk about the US system and how the Americans have developed stewardship. Having spent nearly four years working with clients in both the US and Canada I have seen at first hand what they mean by, and understand to be, stewardship. As this paper shows I am contesting their true understanding of the use of this word.

My other experiences are of being on the charity fundraising side of the fence. Battling through these very issues as a fundraiser with one of the larger UK investors in face-to-face fundraising, concerns about what to do with our donors after we have recruited them has left a telling mark on my thinking about stewardship.

During these years I have met many great and inspirational fundraisers, people who are doers and thinkers, and some of them are referred to in this paper by name. It has been through conversations with them, watching what they and their organisations do when I have supplied with them donor acquisition and development services, and listening to them present on their subjects, that I have developed many of my ideas on stewardship.

So this paper is written with my experiences on both sides of the fundraising fence across many fundraising markets, and maybe a wee hint of the Brig a Doon thought process that the people standing up and talking about this are from north of the border where the Original Young Pretender to the Stuart throne started it all so many years ago.

Biography

Over the last eight years Gordon has spearheaded the development of face to face throughout Europe and North America for over 40 NGOs. Previously he was the fundraiser at AICR who have grown significantly since he introduced face-to-face fundraising in 1999. During this period he has spoken widely on face-to-face fundraising and related donor development strategies.

In his new role he is focusing on ensuring that organisations benefit from proper stewardship of their committed donors who have been recruited through face to face and other acquisition programmes.

A member of the Institute of Fundraising in the UK and the AFP in the USA, currently he sits on the executive committee of the Institute in Scotland. Gordon is a past Chair of the Scottish Fundraising Conference, past vice chair provider panel of the PFRA and an active volunteer for the Resource Alliance.

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