

## 2.12. CDE project 6. The use and misuse of emotion.

# George Orwell on emotion

The real power of emotion may be far too big a question to be dealt with here.

George Orwell (1903 to 1950. Born Eric Arthur Blair), is one Britain's finest writers, an essayist and author well worth studying for, among other things, his insights into the art and craft of communicating ideas through the written word. He also said some interesting things about the use and misuse of emotion. Here's just a taste of them.

*'The great enemy of clear language is insincerity'*

George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, 1946.

In Orwell's essays nationalism, patriotism and Anglophobia are all described as emotions, like love and hatred. He believed intensely patriotic people were capable of suppressing their emotions.

*'When loyalty is involved', he wrote, 'pity ceases to function.'*

Emotions, Orwell reasoned, can make us blind to reality too. He was convinced that it was emotional blindness that caused Britain's right wing Tories to disbelieve the seeming inevitability that Britain would come out of World War II with reduced power and prestige.

*'There is no limit to the follies that can be swallowed if one is under the influence of feelings of this kind. As soon as fear, hatred, jealousy and power worship are involved, the sense of reality becomes unhinged.'*

George Orwell, *Notes on Nationalism*, 1945.

Pride may have played a part too. Orwell also said, *'You cannot get rid of these feelings simply by taking thought.'*

The truth is such feelings are emotions. They are you. You cannot ignore them, you must simply recognise them and try to manage and control them as best as you can.

Orwell had helpful views on writing emotionally versus intellectually. As an intellectual he recognised that some so-called 'bad' books could be really good.

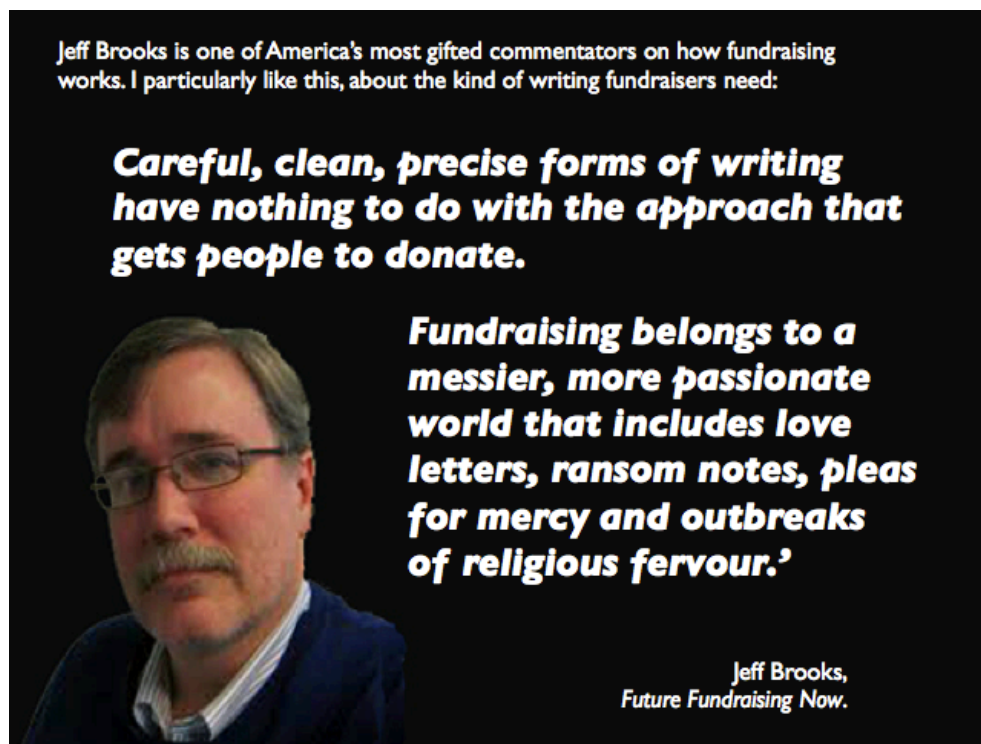
*'Perhaps the supreme example of the good bad book is Uncle Tom's Cabin (Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel about slavery in America's south. Orwell's generation was brought up on this). It is an unintentionally ludicrous book, full of preposterous melodramatic incidents; it is also deeply moving and essentially true... I would back it to outlive the complete works of Virginia Woolf or George Moore (intellectual writers of their day), though I know of no strictly literary test which would show where the superiority lies.*

*'Carlyle would be found to be a more intelligent man than Trollope. Yet Trollope has remained readable and Carlyle has not: with all his cleverness he has not even the wit to write in plain straightforward English.'*

George Orwell, *Good bad books*, 1945.

Aspiring writers for fundraising would do well to learn from this. Donors are not looking for literary or intellectual excellence nor are they seeking cleverness, completeness, professionalism or even expertise. They want evident competence, the deeply moving and the essentially true.

For more on Orwell and fine emotional writing generally see here <https://goo.gl/IJSFzL> or get yourself a copy of George Smith's brilliant *Tiny essentials of writing for fundraising* <https://goo.gl/sB2VPj>



Jeff Brooks is one of America's most gifted commentators on how fundraising works. I particularly like this, about the kind of writing fundraisers need:

**Careful, clean, precise forms of writing have nothing to do with the approach that gets people to donate.**

**Fundraising belongs to a messier, more passionate world that includes love letters, ransom notes, pleas for mercy and outbreaks of religious fervour.'**

Jeff Brooks,  
Future Fundraising Now.