

The use and misuse of emotion. Section 3: the science of emotions.

3.4.

Emotional intelligence: the fundraiser's friend

By Jen Love

'Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage our relationships and ourselves effectively. It consists of four fundamental capabilities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skill.'

Simone Joyaux, *Strategic Fund Development*

Charities are engines of social change in our neighbourhoods, cities, countries and our world. They are measured in human impact, in real social change: children learn to read, prisoners of conscience are freed, women and kids leave abusive homes, more killer whales or yellow-bellied sap suckers thrive in a healthier habitat. And we, working on behalf of these charities, share this impact through brilliant, emotional and personal storytelling.

Now is the time to apply emotional intelligence to our charities' leadership, strategies and storytelling. In their book *Emotional Intelligence*, and the follow-up, *Primal Leadership*, Daniel Goleman and his co-authors provide the science that backs up what we've always felt and what our results show: being more emotionally connected to each other on fundraising teams is more rewarding. And, being more emotionally open and connected to our donors raises more money.

Simone Joyeaux, in her book *Strategic Fund Development*, provides an excellent and concise definition of emotional intelligence: the ability to manage our relationships and ourselves effectively, consisting of four fundamental capabilities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skill.

In *Primal Leadership*, the authors share that the open loop nature of our limbic system, our brain's emotional centre, means we take our emotional cues from our leaders. Leaders who nurture an emotionally intelligent environment foster resonance. You are attuned to the feelings of others and can move people in a positive emotional direction. When you speak authentically, with passion, and from your own values, you resonate with the emotions of those around you, hitting the right chords and making people feel uplifted and inspired. When you create resonance, you create a reservoir of positivity that frees the best in people.

We can all rewire our brains to tune into our emotional intelligence, and choose emotionally intelligent behaviours. It's a 5-part process:

- examine your ideal self.
- come to terms with your real self, as others experience you.
- create a plan to bridge the gap between ideal and real.
- practice those activities.
- create a community of 'change enforcers' to keep the process alive.

You. Right now. You can choose more emotionally intelligent behaviour. And I'm calling on you to do just that.

Open hearted leadership

Let's connect this sense of emotional connectedness, sharing of personal stories, experiences and values with the most important people in our sector: our donors. Our donors look to our organisations and our leaders, for vision, clarity and assurance. Our donors look to us as the enabler of our shared dreams. And they need to trust both our expertise in delivering our mission and also trust that we care as much as they do about it.

Great major gift fundraisers I look up to, like my partner in exploring open-hearted leadership, Beth Ann Locke, know that donors are more connected to our organisations when they can be vulnerable and share their stories, because we in turn are also vulnerable and open.

I am calling on all fundraisers to examine and reflect on your own personal agency as it relates to emotional intelligence and empathy. If your budgets (or your projections, or your suppliers) lead you to making decisions that don't feel right, take the time to reflect on that. Take the time to focus on doing what feels right to you and to do what's right by our donors. After all, good fundraising is a long game, and we believe you'll have a more enriching and rewarding career, and raise more money in the long term, if you do what feels right.

I acknowledge that, as a result of more emotionally intelligent and empathetic fundraising, we might, in the short term, fall short of some targets. And I know some people make the argument that we should keep doing whatever makes us

the most money to serve our beneficiaries. I agree, a little bit, with that. I get the point.

Developing your emotional intelligence

But the voice that speaks louder to me is the voice that asks: 'How would I feel if I was on the other end of this whole conversation?' If I, as Jane Donor, knew that the charity I love and cherish had 'done the math' which says the right thing to do is to send me soulless, mission-vacant premiums. Or call me every two weeks. I might say: 'Okay have my money.' But I would not be feeling anything. I would be giving despite of the way I was treated and thought of.

That's not the business we fundraisers should be in. We are not in the business of chasing a constantly lowering bottom line. We are not in the business of finding innovation in economies of scale based on how many millions of identical packs can be churned out of a polluting factory in China so that charities can plop on their logo, make a tweak and send it. Even if it makes the most money.

My fellow fundraisers and world-changers, let's find the time to reflect on the collective impact we have on our donors. Know that every time you make a decision that leads to over-solicitation, skirting the rules around do not call lists, or making exceptions on what your donors' expressed interests are, you are giving permission for every other fundraiser to do exactly the same. And you're also responsible for it. Does that change how you see your personal agency in decision making?

The first step in honing in on our own emotional intelligence is self-awareness. I want all of us to start, and continue to have conversations with our colleagues about what makes us feel good about our work, what makes us feel vulnerable. What just doesn't feel right.

And to do that, we need open hearted leaders. Open-hearted leaders provide emotional guidance, and build relationships with authenticity, honesty and transparency. Open-hearted leaders listen with intention and purpose, and they seek conversations, collaboration and feedback. Open-hearted leaders build and nurture resilient and ambitious teams, allowing others to step up and step into a solution space that is evolving and changing. Open-hearted leaders recognize that we are choosing to be more vulnerable and embrace the consequences.

We're all in this together. Let's start asking ourselves what we can do to become more emotionally intelligent fundraisers, more open-hearted leaders. If you want to learn more about honing in on your emotional intelligence, take the time to read *Primal Leadership*. Reflect. And talk about it. I'd love to hear what you think! Let's start these conversations right now. Let's look critically and honestly at the

decisions we're making, the stories we're telling and the impact they're having on our relationships with our donors. Now is the time.

© Jen Love/ The Commission on the Donor Experience 2016



Jen Love is a Partner at Agents of Good. Agent Jen is a storyteller. But not in a poetic sense, in a fumbling, arm-waving, half-sentence-speaking, let's-get-to-the-heart-and-the-feelings sense. Write drunk, edit sober...even if you're only drunk on emotions.