

Increase Giving: Begin with Powerful Storytelling



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Whether in a capital campaign, annual giving, or planned giving program, generous giving happens when people believe your organization is changing people's lives. Sadly, most churches try to grow giving by presenting data, finance reports, and line item budgets. This approach doesn't work! Rather than share facts and figures, tell stories of how you are making an impact.

How does storytelling help grow giving?

The pastor called as I was getting off the plane. She said, "Scott, I'm being moved." After a moment of stunned silence I asked, "When?" Her response shocked, surprised and even angered me. This popular pastor was being moved in the middle of the public phase of a capital campaign for debt. The debt we were funding was the result of building a multi-million dollar youth and community center.

Later that day I met with the capital campaign leadership team. They were grieving and I had little hope of a productive meeting. As I stood there pondering what I might say, the youth pastor came up to me and said, "Remember you asked for some video testimony from our youth? Well, I have a video if you'd like to show it."

The youth pastor hit "play" and a handsome young man, about 14 or 15 years old, appeared on screen and told his story. He had been physically and sexually abused as a child. At the age of 12 he began drinking and then attempted suicide.

He said, "Life was not worth living and then someone invited me to youth group. It was the first time I knew someone cared." Then, looking into the camera, he said, "Thank you. Life is worth living. You saved my life." With his permission, this video became the centerpiece of the campaign.

In the midst of grieving their pastor's transfer, the young man reminded us of the importance of their ministry. The church's generosity was having a life-changing impact. As a result, despite the pastor preparing to leave, the church raised more money in the second campaign than in the first.

The reason for such generous giving was powerful storytelling.

To inspire generous giving, donors need to hear stories of transformation. Financial reports fall on deaf ears and do nothing to inspire giving. In making the case for debt reduction, we might have said,

"We spent X dollars and we now have X dollars in debt with an interest rate of 6%. If we eliminate the debt we will save X dollars." Then we would probably add, "Since building our youth and community center, we've grown our youth group from X to Y." Yes, the facts are important.

Facts don't inspire generosity. Stories of impact grow giving.

For example, after V.B.S., instead of reporting you had 25 kids and 15 volunteers, tell their stories. Ask parents to talk about the impact V.B.S. had on them and their children. Better yet, invite a child to talk about what V.B.S. meant to him or her. Ask volunteers to talk about the joy of serving and how they saw God at work.

How can you begin inspiring generosity with powerful storytelling? Here are some ideas:

1. Identify stories at staff meetings, leadership meetings, and program meetings. Be prepared for silence and blank stares. However, if you persist, sharing stories will eventually become the best part of your meetings.

2. Regularly ask people to tell stories in worship—send out video links, always with permission.
3. Solicit stories after significant events like V.B.S, mission trips, Bible Studies, youth retreats, etc.
4. Any communication, newsletter or email blast should include at least one story.
5. Personal giving statements, and other communication about finances, should include stories of how the generosity of the church members is transforming lives. Connect money with the church's ability to do ministry. Tell people how their generosity is impacting people every day.
6. When you present the budget, resist reporting data only. Through powerful storytelling, you will transform your budget into a compelling tale of God's work.

When you begin asking people to tell their stories, some people will argue they don't have a story. However, each of us has a story to tell. You can help people get in touch with their stories.

Ask simple, yet thought-provoking questions such as...

What difference has the church made in my life?

Because of my relationship to God, how is my life different?

How is my life different because I...

- went on a mission trip?
- teach Sunday School?
- attend youth group?
- participated in a weekend retreat?
- became more generous?
- started to tithe?
- attended a Bible study?

Do you want to inspire generosity and increase giving?

Instead of reporting facts and figures — tell stories. When the focus is on powerful storytelling, meetings become more enjoyable and newsletters, email blasts and financial statements come alive. In addition, you and your people will know that all the time, energy and yes, all the money, is in fact making a difference. And that makes it all worthwhile.

For more insights on powerful storytelling go [here](#) and [here](#).

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