



How nonverbal and verbal skills can make all the difference with donors—and why young fundraisers should care :)



ALL THUMBS?

BY PAUL LAGASSE AND
MARY ELLEN COLLINS

If some of the very popular sessions at the recent AFP International Conference on Fundraising—“How Tweet It Is! Mastering Social Media for Fundraising Success”; “Online Strategies, Tools and Trade Secrets”; “Fundraising in the Blogosphere”; “The Next Big Thing: Camera Phone Fundraising”; “Understanding the Impact of Cell Phones, Gen X and Gen Y on Annual Giving”; and “Yeah, Yup, Right On—Getting the Younger Donor to Say ‘Yes’ to Your Nonprofit”—are any indication, fundraisers are feeling the pressure to learn the new technologies as soon as possible. Good idea.

After all, today’s teens and young adults are the most connected generation. Some 75 percent of 12–17-year-olds own cell phones, up from 45 percent in 2004, according to the study *Teens and Mobile Phones* from the Pew Research Center. Seventy-two percent of all teens, or 88 percent of teen cell phone users, are text messagers. One in three teens sends more than 100 text messages a day, or 3,000 texts a month.

Millennials (adults ages 18 to 29) equally embrace all things digital. The study *Millennials: Confident, Connected and Open to Change* by the Pew Research Center, February 2010, shows that Millennials are more likely to have their own social networking profiles, post video of themselves online and use cell phones to send text messages than are older Americans (Gen X, baby boomers and the silent generation).

Nonverbal and Verbal Skills

There's the rub. Older generations of fundraisers are doing their best to keep up with new technology and reach younger donors, but are younger people learning the skills that are so essential to successful fundraising?

As well-rounded development professionals know, "You get only one chance to make a good first impression." They spend their careers cultivating and refining that impression by polishing their interpersonal skills—endless patience, excellent listening skills, clear and accurate writing and the ability to "read" donors. They also need many other skills—they must be sharp analysts, have a keen business acumen, be able to communicate across multiple donor demographics and be conversant with ever-changing media. Fundraisers need all these tools and techniques to develop relationships that are critical to their organizations' success.

Will today's teens and Millennials—the next generations of fundraisers—have the necessary skills to develop those indispensable relationships with donors?

The 'Silent Fluency'

Mark Bauerlein, professor of English at Emory University in Atlanta (www.emory.edu), believes that overexposure to online social media technologies is depriving students of opportunities to develop fluency in the nonverbal and expressive behaviors that supplement written and spoken language. In his article "Why Gen-Y Johnny Can't Read Nonverbal Cues" (*The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 4, 2009), Bauerlein wrote, "We live in a culture where young people—outfitted with iPhone and laptop and devoting hours every evening from age 10 onward to messaging of one kind and another—are ever less likely to develop the 'silent fluency' that comes from face-to-face interaction. It is a skill that we all must learn, in actual social settings, from people (often older) who are adept in the idiom. As text-centered messaging increases, such occasions diminish. The digital natives improve their adroitness at the keyboard, but when it comes to their capacity to 'read' the behavior of others, they are all thumbs."

Bauerlein's opinion piece resonates with development professionals because that "silent fluency" enables them to build trust, rapport and understanding with donors. The thought of an entire generation of fundraisers lacking that fluency is alarming. "These are not natural communications," Bauerlein explains. "You learn them. We don't have the capacity to read people until we've spent a lot of 'face time' developing those capacities. If you have shifted your communication away from face-to-face to a screen—often a tiny screen—common sense tells you that many of those face-to-face skills will not develop at the same rate."



The same applies to written communications, Bauerlein adds. Although kids are reading and writing more words than ever, thanks to social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook, paradoxically their reading and writing scores are declining. Bauerlein says that this is due to the nontransferability of writing skills across genres. "Writing a lot of text messages makes you very good at writing text messages," he points out. "It doesn't make you good at writing research papers. In fact, it might actually hinder your capacity." As a result, says Bauerlein, author of *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (Tarcher/Penguin, 2008), students are developing bad communication habits that will impair them when they reach adulthood.

Furthermore, social media are effectively dynamiting intergenerational bridges, creating gulfs of understanding and empathy. "What do 15-year-olds care about? Other 15-year-olds," Bauerlein says. "The vast majority of communications through text messaging, email and Facebook are to people their own age. These tools extend peer-to-peer contact to levels we've never seen before. They don't have a basis for exchange across the generations."

The implications for fundraising are evident, he argues: "How do you sit down and establish a rapport with someone who served in World War II? It might be nice if you knew a little about World War II first."

Several recent studies focused on the private sector illustrate Bauerlein's concerns. In a survey of 302 companies conducted by Hart Research Associates for the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) (*Raising The*

Bar: Employers' Views on College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn, researchers found that 89 percent of the employers surveyed believe colleges should be placing more emphasis on “the ability to communicate effectively, orally and in writing.” In fact, this was respondents’ highest-ranking priority, even higher than critical thinking skills and ethical decision making. The *2005 Skills Gap Report: a Survey of the American Manufacturing Workforce* (www.iowa workforce.org/rig/education/manskillsgap.pdf), conducted by Deloitte for the National Association of Manufacturers and the Manufacturing Institute, found that 36 percent of the manufacturers surveyed reported their employees had “insufficient reading, writing and communication skills,” and that these deficiencies directly affected productivity and customer service.

Messages Without Words

Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D., president of Kinsey Consulting Services in Berkeley, Calif. (www.ckg.com), is confident that the problem is not intractable. “We’re hardwired to understand body language,” she says. “The generation coming up has the same innate abilities, but what they’re missing is some of the lessons that they could have picked up had they received more face-to-face experience in their training.”

In fact, because the next generation of communication technologies rely heavily on video—computer and cell-phone video cameras at home and videoconferencing at work—young adults may soon come full circle and rediscover the importance of nonverbal cues.

Goman says that fundraisers need to be able to project authority and competence when discussing their organizations’ mission, as well as warmth, empathy and compassion when soliciting a gift. In his classic 1971 study *Silent Messages*, UCLA psychology professor Albert Mehrabian found that, in verbal communications in which listeners perceive inconsistencies between speakers’ words and their tone of voice or body language, the listeners will rely on the speakers’ tone of voice and facial expressions to determine their feelings for, and attitudes toward, the speakers. In other words, a donor hearing rosy claims from a fundraiser who is shifting nervously is more likely to disbelieve the words he or she is hearing, even though the fundraiser is telling the truth.

Fundraisers also need to know how to read expressions and actions of the people they are talking to. “You need to be able to tell whether they’re about to sign or walk out the door,” says Goman, author of *The Nonverbal Advantage: Secrets and Science of Body Language at Work* (Berret-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2008). She identifies common mistakes people often make when attempting to interpret nonverbal signs:

- **They forget to consider the context.** Meaning changes with context. To understand someone’s behavior, consider the circumstances under which the behavior occurred.
- **They try to find meaning in a single gesture.** Nonverbal cues occur in groups that reinforce a common point. While a single gesture can have several meanings or none

The Power of Patience

How will today’s teens and Millennials—tomorrow’s fundraisers—deal with patience? After all, the whole point of texting and Facebook is always knowing what is going on right now—not 10 minutes ago or even 10 minutes from now. Development professionals spend weeks, months or years with donors, moving them through the cycle that leads to a gift.

“The lack of patience comes from an internal reaction to a perception of an external factor or event,” says Skip Weisman, founder and president of Weisman Success Resources (www.weismansuccessresources.com) in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He cites the example of taking a long time to get on a donor’s calendar, only to have the person cancel via voicemail on the morning of the meeting. “You’re deflated, but you have to put it in context. Is this a real rejection or did something really come up so that the person couldn’t meet? If he didn’t say, ‘Don’t ever call me again,’ give him the benefit of the doubt.”

Peter Bregman, CEO of Bregman Partners (www.peterbregman.com) in New York City, emphasizes the importance of remembering that you have the power to see any setback through the lens of either understanding or anger. “Let’s say someone cancels a meeting with you for the third time. You’re not sure why. You need tremendous patience when you can’t understand why people act a certain way. It helps if you choose the right story to explain their actions and then let that story govern your response. You can choose to think the person is a jerk or you can choose to think that maybe his kid is sick. You’ll have a lot more patience if you choose the story about his sick kid.”

The last thing you want to do is grab a cell phone and Tweet an angry or frustrated message. “Take a deep breath and take a break. Get up and walk around the block,” Weisman suggests. “You need to change your body language in order to change your internal language.”

He also suggests keeping a journal about your fundraising successes with your top five or 10 donors and referring to it when something makes you want to throw in the towel. “Call one of those people just to say hello and see how they’re doing. It’s a way to reconnect them to your organization, and it’s a little pick-me-up for you that will reinforce a positive mind-set.”

Bregman advises a quick return to the business at hand as you refocus on your goal. “It’s OK to be disappointed, but then you say, ‘What’s my plan? I’m going to call the donor’s assistant right now and get back on the calendar.’ You could stay in the disappointed mode, or you could turn around quickly. A champion will have a shorter turnaround time.”



at all, its meaning becomes clearer when coupled with other signals.

- **They are too focused on what's being said.** By focusing solely on the words, a listener may miss a larger meaning entirely.
- **They don't know a person's "baseline."** Knowing a person's normal behavior enables an observer to spot meaningful deviations.
- **They judge body language through the bias of their own culture.** Some nonverbal behaviors vary among cultures to the



Positive signals such as dilated eyes, facing and leaning forward, reading handouts intently, frequent eye contact and even uncrossed feet are all signs that the donor is interested and engaged. While it may be comfortable to stand with crossed arms, it may be sending the wrong signal. “What they



assume you mean with that position is what matters,” Goman emphasizes.

Consultant John Boe, principal with John Boe International in Kettering, Ohio (www.johnboe.com), agrees. “It’s all about trust and rapport,” he says, and body language—both projected and interpreted—is essential for building that rapport. Boe divides people into Workers, Talkers, Watchers and Thinkers. Each type has characteristic energy levels, physical features and traits and preferences. Talkers, for example, prefer fast-paced, interactive presentations, while Thinkers prefer logically ordered, highly detailed case statements.



“It’s up to the fundraiser to adjust his or her personality to suit the donor,” Boe explains. “If you have an aggressive style and your donor has a passive one, you’re going to have a disconnect.”

Matching and Mirroring

Skilled fundraisers are able to automatically adjust their energy and body language to more closely resemble those of the donor, a technique Boe calls “matching and mirroring.” Verbal cues will tell a fundraiser whether a donor learns audibly (“I hear you”), visually (“I see what you mean”) or kinesthetically (“I get it”). Visual cues such as posture will tell you whether they are eager, wary or indifferent.

Accurate nonverbal communication is an indispensable tool for Lisa Guyon, executive director of Building Impact (www.buildingimpact.org), an innovative and award-winning community-development nonprofit in Boston. Guyon relies on face-to-face meetings to maintain relationships with more than 500 business tenants in 50 buildings in the greater Boston area, helping more than 18,000 of their employees find ways to volunteer and donate to dozens of local charitable organizations.

It was the perception of a link between habit and the lack of engagement in office tenants that led to the founding of Building Impact six years ago to foster “everyday philanthropists,” Guyon explains. Part of their strategy is to have



“YOU NEED TO REALIZE THAT BODY LANGUAGE IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER.”

point where what’s proper and correct in one culture may be ineffective—or even offensive—in another.

“You need to realize that body language is in the eye of the beholder,” says Goman, whose new book *The Silent Language of Leaders* will be published by Jossey-Bass in the spring of 2011. “What you’re looking for is engaged versus nonengaged.”

personal interaction at least four times a year. When Guyon and her staff of eight meet with tenants, they start with a single question: What do you do in the community? “From my perspective, it takes the onsite, face-to-face, nonverbal interaction to really move people down that continuum,” Guyon says.

“Philanthropy is tied to that innate personal connection,” adds Guyon, who expresses concern that increasing reliance on technological intermediaries will hinder the development of genuine relationships with volunteers. “It feels like every year the generation behind us is becoming more techno-centric. There have to be consequences to that. I don’t know what it’s going to demand of the generation behind us.”

Whether attending a large gala or a small reception for major donors, fundraisers’ success depends on making the most of personal interactions in a group setting. Marcy Steiner, executive director of the Seton Health Foundation in Troy, N.Y. (www.setonhealth.org), suggests that you act the same way you would if you were hosting people in your home.

“It’s all about hospitality and going out of your way to anticipate how a guest feels, and it’s very intentional. You want people to feel welcome and comfortable. We always have someone at the door, greeting people before they get to the registration table. There’s nothing better than having someone call you by name and say, ‘We’re so glad to see you!’”

Approach newcomers and longtime supporters with the same warmth and openness. And whether you are privy to background prospect research or trying to gather new infor-

mation, exercise restraint. Carry on a conversation, not an interrogation. “Be discreet about the information you know,” advises speaker Susan RoAne in Greenbrae, Calif. (www.suanroane.com), author of *Face to Face: How to Reclaim the Personal Touch in a Digital World* (Fireside, 2008). “Don’t make your conversation sound like stalking. With new people, ask about their special link to the organization and what brought them to the event. But if all you do is ask questions, if you’re grilling people, you’re not making conversation. It can be considered very invasive. You have to have your own stories and make your own observations.”

At a social function you may be tempted to mingle with people you know well, but try to make as many connections as possible. Interacting with groups of volunteers in a work setting requires a different skill set than working a party. Staffing a committee involves keeping meetings going in a positive direction, while making sure that everyone gets a chance to contribute. For new fundraisers, stepping in to a strange situation with people they do not know may feel daunting, but Steiner suggests turning it into an opportunity to learn and start developing relationships. “If you’re a new staff person working with a committee, don’t buy into the fact that being new is such a disadvantage. Call some of the volunteers before the meeting. Tell them you want to introduce yourself. Ask how they got involved with the organization or that committee.”

Mingling and making important small talk is one thing, but both seasoned fundraisers and those new to the profession agree that public speaking is a terrifying experience. However,

On the Radar

GAIL PERRY, MBA, CFRE

I sat in the lobby in a huge New York skyscraper, waiting for a Wall Street hedge-fund manager, our multimillion-dollar prospect. I knew this man was extremely busy and would probably have about 13½ minutes to devote to my visit. My goal was to stay in his office exactly as long as I could have his attention and not one moment longer. (Boring him and staying too long would be a huge mistake, probably making it impossible to get another appointment.)

I had to employ my secret tool: my radar. When I visited with him, my radar would go around and around, over and over. I was watching for signals that would tell me the level of his attention. I had to watch carefully for signs that would tell me how interested he was in my visit, how interested he was in our cause, whether he was engaged or bored.

Here is what my radar picked up that day:

- **Body language:** He was open, attentive and interested. His arms weren’t crossed, which was a good sign.
- **Eyes:** He was looking at me with interest, at least for the first eight minutes. Then his eyes darted around and I could tell something had crossed his mind. I shifted in my seat, wondering if I should prepare to leave.
- **Fidgeting:** He nervously fidgeted with something on his desk. He must have been thinking about something, but it wasn’t interfering with our conversation.
- **Tone of voice:** This sounded good and he seemed to be in a fairly good humor. I knew he could be a bit volatile, so I particularly watched for any sign of that.
- **Smiling:** Yes, thank goodness he was in a positive mind-set.
- **Questions and comments:** This was the

most important piece of information of all. His questions and comments told me what was on his mind, where he stood and what he was thinking about our project. This is invaluable, and I noted what he asked about in my trip report.

All of a sudden his assistant popped her head in with some silent communication to him. Everything changed. He clearly moved on to something else that was important. I stood up, smiled and got out the door, thanking my trusty radar for helping me once again.

Don’t ever forget your secret tool. Your radar won’t fail you if you focus carefully on your prospect and read the important signals. 📡

Gail Perry, MBA, CFRE, is founder of Gail Perry Associates in Raleigh, N.C., www.gailperry.com, and author of Fired Up Fundraising (Wiley, 2007).

Nonverbal and Verbal Skills

practice does make perfect, according to Bill Cole, founder and CEO of William B. Cole Consultants (www.mentalgamecoach.com) in Cupertino, Calif. “A lot of people say, ‘I don’t want to sound stilted. I want to be natural. I’ll just shoot from the hip and I’ll be fine.’ But winging it is self-delusional. The key is to prepare like a maniac and give a performance that looks spontaneous. You become confident through competence, and that means massive preparation.”

Lily Iatridis, president and founder of Fearless Delivery: Solutions in Public Speaking (www.fearlessdelivery.com) in Atlantic Highlands, N.J., recommends developing very clear objectives about the top two or three points you want to make. “Someone who is enthusiastic and passionate about what they want to share may overload the audience by squeezing in too many stories, facts and pieces of information. The audience can’t absorb that much, and they leave feeling overwhelmed and confused.”

If there is a question-and-answer period at the end of your presentation, be prepared. “Write down all the questions you could possibly be asked, especially the worst ones,” Cole



MANY PEOPLE MAKE THE MISTAKE OF **NOT STAYING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT** WHEN THEY ARE IN A CONVERSATION.



advises. “Then write down your answers. That goes a long way toward reducing the fear.”

Again, the nonverbal cues—your delivery—are just as powerful as the content of your presentation. Smile, stand straight and make eye contact. “You only have about 90 seconds to make a first impression,”

Cole says. “Image is gigantic in speaking. You can influence people to do what you want them to do with more than your words. If a speaker looks good and has passion and excitement, people will have a good feeling about the organization.”

They also will have a good feeling about the organization if you accurately hear what your supporters are telling you.

Listen and Learn

According to *Teens and Mobile Phones*, “There are several reasons why teens would choose texting over talking. Texting



allows for asynchronous interaction and it is more discrete than making voice calls. Texting can be a buffer when dealing with parents and can be safer when interacting with potential romantic partners. Since texting is asynchronous, it does not necessarily command the attention of a conversational partner. This means that a teen can send a message and then simply await the answer. The person receiving it can deal with the message as the situation allows.”

In other words, there are no words to hear. Being an effective fundraiser, however, requires the ability to really listen to what your supporters think and feel. “It takes a lot of work to listen,” says Keith Rosen, author and CEO of Profit Builders (www.profitbuilders.com), a coaching and training company in Merrick, N.Y. “In intentional, active listening, you’re not just listening to the words people speak—that’s passive listening. Instead, you’re listening for the deeper meaning behind the words that include the person’s goals, dreams, desires, needs, expectations, concerns and fears.”

Many people make the mistake of not staying in the present moment when they are in a conversation. “What gets in the way of truly authentic, masterful listening is that people

are already listening through a filter based on past experiences or future expectations,” Rosen explains. “They’re thinking ‘This sounds like a similar conversation I had with someone else,’ and as a result, certain costly assumptions are made. Conversely, they’re focused on their agenda—what they want out of the conversation and what they’re going to say next. Listening is an active skill that happens in the present. If you’re too busy passing judgment on the person you’re speaking with or you are worried about what has happened or what’s going to happen, you’re really not listening. Shift your focus and attention onto the other person rather than being attached to the outcome and result you want. It sounds counterintuitive; however, when your focus in every conversation is on delivering value, being collaborative and helping the other person get what they want out of the conversation, you wind up getting what you need as a natural byproduct of your good intentions.”

According to Dianna Booher, CEO of Booher Consultants Inc. (www.booher.com) in Grapevine, Texas, guiding a discussion with the right questions is a key aspect of good listening. “Have a purpose for the questions you ask. Probe with open-ended questions if you want to get to their subjective feelings, such as ‘What kind of challenges might you run into by making this gift before the end of the fiscal year?’ Ask closed questions when you’ve already reached agreement, for example, ‘Could you make your gift by the end of the month?’”

Effective listeners also understand the importance of silence. In addition to refraining from interrupting someone, Rosen suggests that pausing for four seconds after the other person speaks demonstrates that you are actively listening, which produces trust. He also advises listeners to resist the urge to disagree or argue immediately. “We tend to resist new information if it conflicts with something we believe in,” he says. “You can rebut later, but listen to the whole message.”

For fundraisers, this might mean stifling the urge to jump in too quickly if a donor starts to say why he or she cannot support your project. Hear the person out and then respond. Assure the person that you hear him or her by using clarifiers, such as “If I understand you correctly, you’re saying xyz.”

You also demonstrate your attention to the other person through body language, as well as with words and silences. “Always listen with your entire body,” Booher advises. “Show interest by leaning forward and have an open, inviting facial expression. Nodding when they say something tells them, ‘I’m following you.’ Some people just sit rigid in the chair, with no expression. Or they’re looking at a brochure they’ve brought or taking notes, which says, ‘I’m just waiting you out until you finish talking.’”

With the right combination of preparation, attention and respect, you can be sure that when you say, “I hear you,” your donors will know you really mean it.

Equally important are writing skills, which may be more difficult for many young adults than finding the right words to say.

The Write Words

Writing skills are also at risk among today’s students and young professionals. An assessment of the writing skills of more than 165,000 eighth- and twelfth-graders conducted in 2007 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for example, found that while students’ writing scores had been improving slightly overall, only 33 percent of eighth graders and 24 percent of twelfth graders were writing at or above grade-level proficiency.

Accurate, clear and persuasive written communication is essential for successful fundraising, particularly for grant proposals, says Diane M. Gedeon-Martin, president of The Write Source LLC (www.write-source.com), a grant-writing consultancy based in Glastonbury, Conn. She believes that proposal writing is becoming a lost art in part because technologies that were developed to help people communicate more quickly have instead made it easier for people to communicate more frequently, with a resulting loss in quality amid the density. “Proposal writing is something we must champion because grant makers often look unfavorably on proposals that are poorly written,” she explains. “Grant makers are very savvy these days, and if there’s a similar

proposal that articulates the need and project description well, they may place a higher priority on the one that they can fully grasp the concept of.”

Gedeon-Martin, who is on the faculty of the Fund Raising School at Indiana University, recently completed a two-day basic



grant-proposal writing course that exemplifies the dilemma. “Here were 50 people in my session, with one-half of them under the age of 30,” she recalls. “I spent a lot of time educating them on proper grammar, style and voice.”

Those basics can make or break a grant proposal and, by extension, the nonprofit that needs the money. “Poor writing skills suggest an inability of organizations and their personnel to manage funds,” Gedeon-Martin stresses.

Perhaps ironically, the trend toward ever-shorter communications spurred by text messaging and email has affected grant proposals, too, as more corporate and larger foundation grant makers switch to online-only submissions that place a cap on the number of characters allowed and reduce or eliminate altogether opportunities for face-to-face or telephone meetings. This compression has made it harder for grant seekers, as they try to write persuasive case statements

“THE DAY OF 12- OR 15-PAGE GRANT PROPOSALS TO FOUNDATIONS AND CORPORATIONS ARE LONG GONE.”

in 2,000 characters or less. “The day of 12- or 15-page grant proposals to foundations and corporations are long gone,” Gedeon-Martin explains. “The attention span of reviewers

Teaching Tomorrow’s Philanthropists and Fundraisers

SOPHIE W. PENNEY, PH.D.

When you look at students today, what do you see? Individuals tethered to laptops, PDAs, cell phones, iPods and more? Perhaps you have observed them with their heads down, rapidly texting, Tweeting, updating Facebook information and connecting with others through messages written in a foreign language and phrases of fewer than 140 characters. Does it cause you to wonder if it will ever be possible for people who communicate in such cursory ways to become the major- and mega-gift fundraisers of the future?

Teaching a course on American Philanthropy at Penn State in the fall of 2009 provided a wonderful opportunity to look into the hearts and minds of today’s students. Seeing beyond the texting and Tweeting reveals young people with deep personal motivation—passion, if you will—for making the world a better place, having an understanding of how philanthropy can achieve that lofty goal and showing a desire to be part of the solution.

However, as any major-gift officer knows, passion and motivation, while necessary, are not sufficient to cultivate, ask for and close major gifts. Excellent communication skills, including the ability to listen well, are critical. When constructing the course, consideration had to be given to how one enables young people today to understand philanthropy, nonprofits and

the ways in which major-gift fundraising brings the two together to change and save lives. What experiences would engage students, and what people could they engage with, to allow them to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the major-gift fundraising process?

My approach was to enable students to see what lies beneath the surface with regard to major donors and fundraising. That process began with the first assignment, which was to read a *Newsweek* article by Peter G. Peterson titled “Why I’m Giving Away \$1 Billion” (June 8, 2009, p. 21). Students then had to reflect on and respond in writing to the following questions: If you had \$1 million to give away, to what cause would you direct the funds, and why? More specifically, to which nonprofit organization(s) would you give the \$1 million?

The answers revealed individuals possessing deep passion for different causes—passion often borne of life experiences or the experiences of those close to them. One student, a native of New Orleans, wanted to support Katrina relief, while another, who had spent numerous summers working at a camp for children with cancer, wanted to improve the camp infrastructure and quality of programming. One student focused on educating young women abroad, while another, who plans to become a physician, focused on healthcare.



While these early answers were clear and compelling, few major donors give away \$1 million, let alone \$1 billion, without taking time to reflect deeply about giving up such a sum. Given that, students revisited this exercise at the end of the semester and addressed three new questions:

- Given what you have learned, would you still direct the \$1 million to the same cause or nonprofit and, if so, why?
- If not, to what cause would you now direct the \$1 million?
- Whether or not you changed the direction of your giving, what did you read or hear during the course that influenced

is compromised when they have to read 20 to 30 proposals in a day. How can we keep their attention? We have to write differently by getting to our point quickly. We need to keep them reading.”

At a time when more and more nonprofits are seeking grants just to be able to keep their doors open, the attention-grabbing power of words is that much more important. “You’re not just writing a grant proposal,” Gedeon-Martin emphasizes. “You’re writing an introduction to your whole organization. It might be the only thing they see from you, so it needs to be the best thing you’ve ever written.”

To make sure it is, she says that the writing must:

- **Be persuasive.** Get the reviewer to see your point of view, convince them that you can achieve the outcomes, focusing on how you will achieve the grant maker’s mission.
- **Speak in terms of quantity and quality.** Discuss current

and future target populations in detail, provide numbers and highlight the distinctiveness of your program.

- **Demonstrate program competence.** Discuss the accomplishments of past and current programs, and provide a detailed schedule for the program for which you’re seeking funds.
- **Be punchy.** Use small paragraphs made up of small sentences and use active voice to grab the reader’s attention.

Kristin O’Malley, manager of community investment services at The Cape Cod Foundation (www.capecodfoundation.org) in Yarmouthport, Mass., appreciates the power of the written word in good first impressions. She manages the foundation’s college scholarship program, which administers 65 individual funds totaling approximately \$15 million in principal. In addition to grades, test scores and letters of recommendation, applicants must also submit an

you to either change your mind or hold fast to your original thinking?

Throughout the semester, students interacted with a bevy of guest speakers, including major donors, major-gift officers, deans, vice presidents, directors of nonprofits, volunteers and others. Reading assignments addressed such topics as what motivates donors to give, the structure and function of nonprofits, donor dissatisfaction with nonprofits, major-gift fundraising, legal and ethical issues and stewardship, to name a few.

What did students learn from these experiences and, more important, how did it affect their thinking about philanthropy and major-gift fundraising? Some shifted the focus of their philanthropy completely or in part, while others stuck with their original cause but chose to redeploy the \$1 million. One student, who remained as passionate about her cause as she was at the outset of the course, chose to redirect a portion of her gift to enable the nonprofit she planned to support to hire a major-gift officer. She noted that such an investment could help provide potentially greater funding for ongoing growth and advancement, stretching the impact of her \$1 million gift.

Students also pursued unique, individual projects during the semester, such as writing a paper about a topic related to philanthropy or setting up a Facebook page to raise awareness about a cause. One employed Twitter and others devel-

oped a Facebook Causes presence to promote their passion.

The students revisited their thinking about the project throughout the semester, particularly at midterm and again at the end of the semester. One sophomore was deeply involved in the annual Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon, or THON (www.thon.org). THON is the largest student-run philanthropy in the world, and students plan and implement hundreds of activities over the year, culminating in a 48-hour dance marathon. The students raise a lot of money, motivating donors to contribute \$7.8 million in 2010 to battle childhood cancer (\$61 million has been raised since 1977). In her final paper, the student wrote about how her THON training, coupled with reading and hearing about major-gift fundraising, influenced her relationship with a THON donor. It was heartening to read her comments about a meeting with the donor, during which they had a deep conversation about death (something a major-gift officer would likely discuss when working with a donor committed to battling cancer). She also wrote about willingly engaging in the more mundane, but equally important, task of doing dishes with the donor following a major promotional event held at his place of business. At the end of the paper, the student spoke about building “a lasting relationship” with this donor and “what a joy it was to work with him.”

So yes, there is hope for the future of

major-gift fundraising. Students possess passions that run as deep as those of your most committed major donors. They believe in the power of philanthropy to change and save lives. When provided with insight and information from donors, individuals involved in the fundraising process and others, students can and do set aside PDAs, turn off their laptops and listen carefully.

At the same time, I also learned many lessons:

- Today’s students are deeply passionate about an array of causes and interested in learning about how to employ philanthropy to change and save lives.
- Being exposed to experienced donors, nonprofit executives, volunteers and fundraisers enables students to deepen their understanding of philanthropy and the role major-gift fundraising plays in advancing organizations and causes.
- Self-reflection and defining personal philanthropic goals provide students with perspective that will enable them to more readily relate to individual major-gift donors.
- Students can use technology as a cultivation tool and are able to set aside these tools to engage one-on-one with donors. 📧

Sophie W. Penney, Ph.D., is director of development at Foxdale Village in State College, Pa., www.foxdalevillage.org.

Nonverbal and Verbal Skills

essay describing their academic and career goals, interests and achievements. For such a competitive scholarship, the essays play a crucial role. However, she says that the informality of online communication is increasingly spilling over into the application essays that she's reading.

"We try not to make it an intimidating process," says O'Malley, whose first nonprofit job was writing grants. "But in some of the essays I've seen, for example, the personal statements, it's like they're writing to their friends."

Poorly written statements often fail to convey the applicant's passion, she adds. It's not that young people lack written literacy, she believes, but rather that technology has made it easier to avoid the kinds of face-to-face contact that would help youngsters perceive situationally appropriate behaviors and communication styles. "It gets too easy to just reply to email and not have to bother the person," she says. "You can't pick up on tone in an email, and so it can be misconstrued."

Ideally, O'Malley says, effective writing is one of a suite of communications tools that fundraisers are adept at using as circumstances demand. "You want to have a relationship with donors. It's important to be well-versed in many forms of communication. Otherwise you're not going to be able to communicate with prospective donors or you might alienate the donors you already have."

So will we soon reach a point where we have to teach basic writing, speaking and nonverbal communication skills to fundraisers? Probably not, Bauerlein says. Instead, strong mentor relationships can go a long way toward correcting deficiencies in nonverbal and written communications skills. By working closely with people older and more experienced than themselves—accompanying them on solicitation visits, drafting correspondence, attending meetings—young fundraisers can absorb a lot just by watching and listening. The experiences of Building Impact's Lisa Guyon and the Cape Cod Foundation's Kristin O'Malley bear this argument out.

Bauerlein's own experience illustrates the power of mentoring. In 2003, he left academia to work as a political appointee for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Poet and critic Dana Gioia had just become NEA's chairman, and Gioia faced the challenge of restoring the organization's clout and credibility after a 15-year controversy. "I learned a lot about leadership by going with him to meetings," says Bauerlein, who learned how to talk to business people about the economic value of the arts. He even met with representatives of an organization that wanted to terminate the NEA altogether. "It was a good thing to talk to people who are fundamentally opposed to your mission," Bauerlein recalls. "I had to see how it was done, and it took time. I couldn't have gotten that in a classroom." 🗨️

Paul Lagasse is a freelance writer in Annapolis, Md., www.auwrites.com. Mary Ellen Collins is a freelance writer in St. Petersburg, Fla., mecollins123@yahoo.com.



Resources

Millennials: Confident, Connected and Open to Change, Pew Research Center, February 2010

<http://pewsocialtrends.org/assets/pdf/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf>

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2007/2008468.pdf>

Raising The Bar: Employers' Views on College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn

www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2009_Employer_Survey.pdf

Social Media and Young Adults, Pew Internet & American Life Project, Pew Research Center, February 2010

www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Social-Media-and-Young-Adults.aspx

Teens and Mobile Phones, Pew Internet & American Life Project, Pew Research Center, April 20, 2010

<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Teens-and-Mobile-Phones.aspx>

2005 Skills Gap Report: A Survey of the American Manufacturing Workforce

www.iowaworkforce.org/rig/education/manskillsgap.pdf

"Why Gen-Y Johnny Can't Read Nonverbal Cues," *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 4, 2009

online.wsj.com