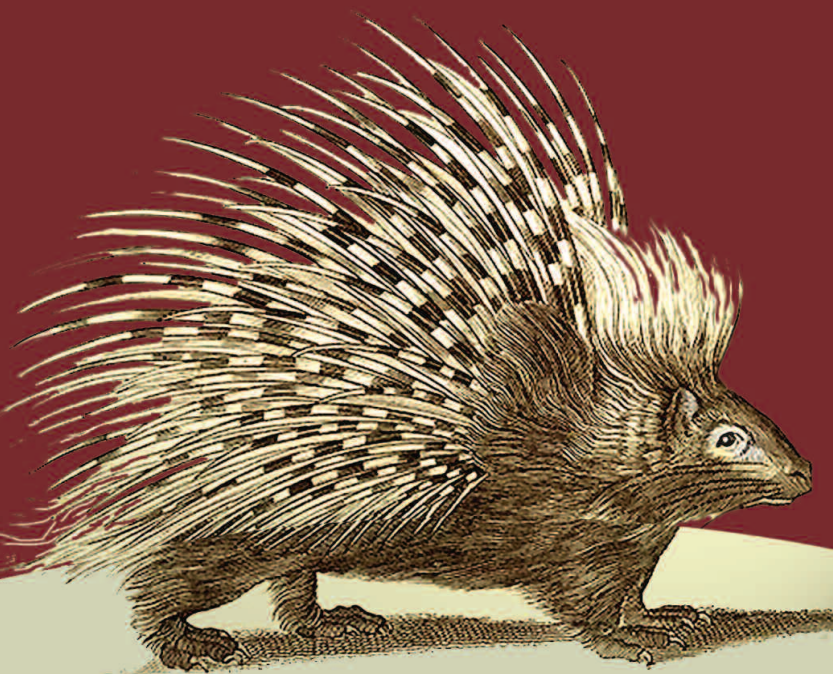


THE PORCUPINE PRINCIPLE

AND OTHER FUNDRAISING SECRETS Jonathan Farnhill



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DIRECTORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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Foreword

When Jonathan Farnhill told me he was writing a book about fundraising I was very quick to accept the honour of writing the foreword. He then told me that it was called *The Porcupine Principle* and I began to get suspicious. My fear was that the porcupine principle was somehow linked to the silly and irreverent joke that goes ‘What’s the difference between a porcupine and The White House? On a porcupine the pricks are on the outside!’ Anyone who has based an entire book on this poor joke must need help and how on earth could I write a foreword about it?

Reading the book relieved any such fears. This book is superb and it should be essential reading for anyone in fundraising. It is full of really thought provoking challenges from a man who would make an excellent contributor to that TV programme ‘Grumpy Old Men’. The difference, and it is a BIG difference, is that this book is packed full of useful and practical ideas that apply to the everyday lives of everyone in fundraising. *The Porcupine Principle* is not a dry read. It is teeming with theories and ideas, and is a relevant and well-written challenge to all fundraisers.

I have known Jonathan for about eight years but one of my regrets is that I do not know him as well as I would like. Having now read this book, my desire to get to know him better has increased tenfold.

Lindsay Boswell
Chief Executive
Institute of Fundraising

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**‘Philanthropy seems to have become
simply the refuge of people who wish to
annoy their fellow creatures’**

Oscar Wilde

Introduction

There is an inherent irony in the fact that I am currently Chief Executive of a school. I spent most of my childhood doing my best to avoid school and was so good at avoiding it that I ended up with calamitous A levels as a result. Having surveyed my career choices at this time, I declined the kind offer to turn my temporary job in the fertiliser section of the local garden centre into a permanent one and headed ‘down south’ to Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology. I studied for an HND in Business and Finance (HND, Higher National Diploma, standing for, as I am sure you know, Have No Degree). While studying one of the modules on this course, I had the novel experience of discovering a subject that I really liked. I vividly remember the conversation with my Dad, who, I should point out, is an accountant. Me: ‘Dad, I have finally found a subject I actually like! I actually want to go to the lessons! I really and honestly enjoy it!’ Dad: ‘That’s great, what is it?’ Me: ‘Marketing!’ Cue muffled sounds of phone being dropped, various expletives, then long pause. Dad: ‘Was there absolutely nothing else that interested you?’

I stumbled into fundraising when I had to take a six-month marketing ‘sandwich placement’ as part of my HND. I wrote to the Chairman of Oxfam asking for a job, and enclosed some suggested adverts they might like to use. These involved cutting pictures out of a magazine and then using Letraset to create the copy (for younger readers,

Letraset was a distant precursor to desk top publishing, but not nearly as good and much slower to create because you manually rubbed each letter on to the paper). Sadly, they did not use the adverts but they did use me and that started my fundraising life.

Many people are very sniffy about fundraising, but I think it is a great and important thing to do because it is an essential part of enabling charities to carry out the vital work they do. Of course, those who deliver the work of the charity are critical, but you can not make social change without people and things, and they both cost money. Fundraising, by paid or voluntary fundraisers, is the fuel for your charity's philanthropic engine.

Many people are very disdainful about marketing, too, which is probably more understandable. The thing is, I have always loved marketing, and I know I shouldn't, but I can't help it. When I was a child, I loved the free figurines you used to get in cereal packets: the sense of excitement as you opened the packet to discover whether you had the one you really, really wanted. Even then I think I knew I was being had, but I was happy to be 'had' if it was this much fun.

So many of the conundrums and difficulties to do with fundraising are to do with the fact that it uses very similar techniques and principles to those found in consumer marketing but it is communicating far more significant and profound issues. It is not about washing powder, fashion or music; it is about the eradication of suffering, injustice or about hunger. Can things that are so divergent really use the same means of research, development, delivery, communication, monitoring and evaluation?

For better or worse, I think they can.

Since I left college, I have used these marketing skills for fundraising for many different charities. I have worked for massive multinational charities and tiny local ones. I have

worked in generic ‘any kind of fundraising’ roles and also in specialised ones. I have worked on the ‘coal face’, actually asking people for money, as well as managing others who did the asking. I have been paid to do it, or (as with writing this book) done it voluntarily. These 33 chapters are a distilling of my experiences in fundraising which I hope will encourage you in your fundraising, whoever it is for and in whatever way you do it, and inspire you to achieve more than you ever thought you could.

If you are reading this introduction in the hope that it will explain what the porcupine principle is, then, first, congratulations on reading this far. Second, I am not going to tell you, you will have to read the relevant chapter (after you have bought the book, obviously). But I will tell you that it is a simple concept that looks at the extent to which you communicate your charity’s work in a powerful way but one that does not steamroller the emotions of the potential supporter. This is one of the great fundraising challenges: how do you communicate why what you do is important, without either boring the supporter or traumatising them? The porcupine principle, like the rest of the book that bears its name, is there to help you to be a tippety toppety fundraiser.

What charities do is very often fantastic; and because fundraising is needed to help them to do what they do, that makes fundraising fantastic too. It is a terrific thing to be a part of, whether your charity is Oxfam or your school’s fundraising committee. We are all involved in the same business: leaving the world in a better state than we found it. Fundraising enables the world to be a little bit fairer, more just, more peaceful, kinder, more compassionate, healthier and more understanding. If you are reading this book, then you are probably already part of this work. I hope this book helps you to do it even better.

Divide and conquer

When is £1,000 not £1,000? Easy. When it is four times £250. One of the problems of raising money is that the amount needed can just seem too terrifying. A large part of fundraising lies in motivating and encouraging people to believe that the target is attainable. I was once asked by a 16-year-old how she could raise £1,000 to help fund her summer holiday working with street children in Ethiopia. She was, and I am sure still is, a genuinely inspiring person to be around. Her fear for the project was not for her own safety, or the trauma of what she might see and experience, but for how she was going to raise the money.

One thousand pounds just seemed too daunting a figure, particularly if you were starting from nothing and had a weekly disposable income of about £10. However, it is important that you are not intimidated into inactivity by an ambitious total, whether £1,000 or £1,000,000. How did she raise £1,000? She divided the grand into four equal amounts of £250. Already that made it look better. Then she looked at her different 'giving circles'.

Imagine these are like a Venn diagram (the only bit of maths I liked at school). The giving circles are different social groups to which you have access. One may be, say, a running club or a cricket team. Another may be your work colleagues. Another may be family and friends. Others may be religious groups, your neighbours or street, or locals at your favourite pub. Keep going like this, trying to define all

your different giving circles (if after half an hour, you have only written down ‘my dog’, then this exercise may not work for you). These giving circles will normally overlap to a certain extent (someone at your running club will also be a work colleague, for example). Sometimes, there will be several overlaps. Someone at your running club is also a work colleague, a member of your local pub’s dart team, a freemason and a near neighbour. Needless to say, such people are really terribly important to you and should be fundraising friends for life if they are not already.

Thus, you identify the giving circles where there are some strong overlaps and where you know a large number of people, not just within this circle – an important subtlety: your employer may employ 4,000 people but you need to write down only the number who would know your name or at least recognise you. Pick the top four and set a target for each giving group. Then identify someone who can coordinate your fundraising for you within that giving circle. Get them on board, draw up a group of supporters within each giving circle, meet down at the pub to plan how you will raise the money and then get on with it. Easy, you see.

A couple of explanatory points: if you are a good person, then people will give money to your cause, because really, in their eyes, they are giving money to you. Fundraising is thus an incentive to be a good person. If you are known as ‘that git from accounts’, fundraising will not be easy. It is also why you need to look not at how many people are in your giving circle but at how many within that circle you know, or more importantly who know you.

Second, there are many reasons why a pub is a good place to plot and scheme your fundraising.

- It is an inherently social place, so your ideas will be influenced by what people will like.

- Being in a pub normally involves drinking alcohol, and people often need that to think creatively and honestly.
- It is also a relaxed environment, where people can say what they think is a silly idea, but from which can come an idea of fundraising genius. People will say things in pubs that they will not say elsewhere.
- Pubs are also where people abide by that essential English law: ‘thou must be amusing at all times.’ Fundraising without fun is like football without a foot; still possible but not half as easy. A pub makes the fundraising planning inherently more enjoyable (and also, of course, dramatically increases the chances of the pub becoming one of your four giving circles).

If you follow this process, you will go a long way towards reaching your target. It is important, as well, to try to tailor your fundraising to your particular giving circle. The best fundraising ideas come from within, not from without. What would be particularly appropriate for that particular group? If you can think of something like this, then your giving circle will be more committed to it.

It would be remiss of me at this point not to mention a fundraising idea that I would dearly love to have been my own, but alas it was not. One of the fundraising curses is to be struck down by organising a fundraising event. Notoriously time-consuming and frustrating, despite the marvellous ‘social capital’ it creates, it can be as unpopular to attend as it is to organise. For a growing number of people, time is more precious than money, and yet our fundraising still deals in the ever more expensive currency of time. Three hours to attend a school PTA barbecue is a significant sacrifice if you have no time to call your own.

Therefore, do everyone a favour and do not organise

one at all. Instead, write to those you would have invited to the event and say, nicely, that you were going to organise an event and invite them to it, but, as you do not want to organise it and you know they do not want to come, let's create a win-win situation here by their giving you the money they would have spent at the event. Their social diary becomes a little less clogged, you suddenly find yourself with several hundred hours with which to do something useful that would otherwise have been spent on the event, and your charity has £1,000 in the bank. You will get away with it once and it is probably the most efficient form of fundraising there is. If you make sure you send a gift aid form with the letter, you are laughing all the way to the bank.

Fundraising can be a prickly business ...

Being a fundraiser is exciting and fulfilling, but also full of challenges. Jonathan Farnhill is an experienced fundraiser who knows both the pleasure and the pain of fundraising.

In 33 humorous and pin-sharp vignettes, the book distils the spirit of fundraising, including:

- Divine compost – why what you do *now* matters
- My bubble, you squeak – engaging with the outside world
- The porcupine principle – managing your message.

The Porcupine Principle is both down-to-earth and thought-provoking at the same time. Interwoven with practical fundraising tips and advice, it will help you reflect deeply on your fundraising practice, bringing meaning and a sense of perspective to an invaluable profession.

‘Contains a wealth of ideas from someone who has been there and done it’

Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive, NCVO

‘Deserves to be the fundraising book of the year’

Peter Fletcher FFIA, CFRW University
Hospital Birmingham Charities



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