

How to Increase Your Likability with Donors

Being likable starts with storytelling. This quick guide shows you how to connect with donors and inspire more generosity.



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What You'll Find in This Guide:

- **Why Likability Matters in Fundraising**
Understanding the crucial role of trust and connection.
- **The Power of Storytelling in Likability**
How stories shape donor perception and engagement.
- **Practical Ways to Increase Likability**
Actionable tips, phrases, and examples to enhance donor relationships.
- **Likability Killers – What to Avoid**
Common pitfalls that can harm your donor interactions.
- **Swipe File: Likable, Trust-Building Phrases**
Ready-to-use lines to make meaningful connections.
- **Final Thought: Likability is About Authentic Connection**
How genuine relationships drive fundraising success.

Why Likability Matters in Fundraising

Donors give for many reasons—impact, mission alignment, urgency—but one of the biggest yet often overlooked factors is likability.

People give to people they like and trust.

Likability isn't about charm or extroversion; it's about creating a genuine human connection that makes donors feel valued, heard, and emotionally invested in the cause.

At the heart of likability is storytelling—not just the stories we tell donors but also the inner stories they tell themselves and the stories we tell ourselves as fundraisers. The key to increasing likability is understanding and influencing these stories.

The Power of Storytelling in Likability

1. The Donor's Inner Story

Every donor has an internal narrative that shapes their giving behavior. Your likability as a fundraiser increases when you align with and enhance that narrative.

Ask yourself:

- What does this donor believe about themselves?
- How does supporting our cause fit into their story?
- What emotions or values drive their generosity?

Example: A donor who sees themselves as a protector of vulnerable children won't be moved by generic statistics. They need a story that reinforces their identity as a hero, someone who steps in when a child is in crisis.

2. The Story You Tell the Donor

Likable fundraisers don't just present facts; they tell emotionally compelling stories that make the donor feel personally involved.

- Use donor-centric language ("You made this possible" vs. "We did this")
- Keep stories short but emotionally powerful
- Focus on a critical moment of transformation—the turning point in a person's or community's life because of donor support

Example: Instead of saying, "Our program helps 10,000 children," say, "Because of donors like you, Maria no longer goes to bed hungry. Last week, she ate her first warm meal in days."

3. The Story You Tell Yourself as a Fundraiser

Your own inner narrative affects how you show up in conversations with donors. If you see yourself as a "bother" or as "begging for money," it will reflect in your tone and energy. But if you view yourself as a storyteller and bridge-builder, you become more confident and likable.

Ask yourself:

- Do I believe in the value I bring to donors?
- Am I offering them an opportunity to be part of something bigger?
- How does my own personal story connect to this mission?

Example: A fundraiser who views their role as giving donors the opportunity to be heroes will naturally be more engaging, enthusiastic, and confident in their conversations.

Practical Ways to Increase Likability

Be Authentically Curious About the Donor

Ask about their story before sharing yours. Show genuine interest in their journey, values, and motivations. Make them feel like you are an ally in their personal mission, not just someone soliciting a donation.

- “Tell me, what first drew you to supporting this cause?”
- “I’d love to hear more about what makes this issue important to you.”

Example Interaction: A donor mentions they started giving because their grandmother suffered from the illness your nonprofit addresses. Instead of immediately talking about your programs, ask about their grandmother and what she was like. This builds an emotional bridge before discussing impact.

Use Their Name

Personalization increases connection. Using their name in conversation, emails, and even handwritten notes fosters familiarity and warmth, making them feel recognized and valued.

- “John, I wanted to personally thank you for your incredible support.”
- “Sarah, I thought of you when I heard this amazing success story.”

Example Interaction: Instead of a generic thank-you email, start with “Hi [Donor’s Name], I was thinking about you today because...” and reference something personal from your last conversation.

Find Common Ground

A shared value, experience, or belief fosters connection. Identify what truly matters to them and demonstrate how your cause aligns with their personal mission. Let them feel like you are fighting for their cause, not just yours.

- “I know how much you care about making sure every child gets an education—your passion reminds me of why I started working in this field.”
- “You and I both believe that no one should go hungry. It’s amazing to partner with you on this mission.”

Example Interaction: If a donor expresses concern about food insecurity and shares a personal anecdote, acknowledge it: “That’s powerful. You’re right—no family should have to go through that. That’s exactly why we’re working to expand our meal program.”

Show Genuine Enthusiasm

Passion is contagious; let them feel it. Express why you believe in your mission and how it connects with their values. A donor is more likely to feel energized about giving when they see your sincere commitment.

- “I get excited every time I talk about this because the impact is real. You’re truly changing lives.”
- “I can’t wait to tell you what your support made possible last month!”

Example Interaction: If a donor seems unsure, share a heartfelt success story with genuine excitement, making it clear that their support directly contributes to these outcomes.

Listen More Than You Talk

Likable fundraisers make donors feel heard. Instead of overwhelming them with information, ask insightful questions and let them share their thoughts. Show empathy, validate their perspectives, and build trust by actively engaging with their concerns and aspirations.

- “That’s a really great point—tell me more about what you mean.”
- “I appreciate you sharing that. How do you see yourself making a difference in this space?”

Example Interaction: A donor hesitates about increasing their donation. Instead of pushing them, say, “I totally understand—it’s a big decision. What would make you feel good about giving more?”

Mirror Their Energy & Communication Style

Meet them where they are. Pay attention to their body language, tone, and preferences in conversation. If they are reserved, don’t overwhelm them with high-energy pitches. If they are passionate, reflect that excitement in your responses.

- “I can tell this means a lot to you—thank you for sharing that.”
- “You’re right! That’s exactly why we need to act now.”

Example Interaction: If a donor speaks slowly and thoughtfully, don’t rush the conversation. Match their pace to create a sense of comfort and alignment.

Follow Up Thoughtfully

Reference past conversations to show you were listening. Remind them of what they shared with you, whether it was a concern, a personal anecdote, or an aspiration. This demonstrates that you value their input and see them as more than just a donor.

- “Last time we talked, you mentioned wanting to support early childhood programs—this update is exactly what you were hoping for!”

- “I remember you telling me about your first volunteer experience. I came across something that reminded me of that—thought you’d enjoy it!”

Example Interaction: If a donor mentioned their passion for animal welfare months ago, reach out with, “I just saw this news about a rescue effort, and it made me think of you. Hope you’re doing well!”

Likability Killers – What to Avoid

Even the most well-meaning fundraisers can unintentionally undermine their likability.

Small missteps in communication can create distance rather than connection. To build trust and rapport, it's important to recognize behaviors that might turn donors off. Here are common pitfalls to avoid if you want to foster genuine, lasting relationships with your supporters.

- Talking at a donor instead of with them
- Overloading them with facts instead of evoking emotions
- Making it all about the organization instead of about them
- Ignoring social cues or forcing the ask too early
- Sounding apologetic instead of confident about the opportunity you're presenting

Swipe File: Likable, Trust-Building Phrases

Knowing what to say is just as important as how you say it.

The following ten phrases are designed to make donors feel valued, appreciated, and connected to your cause. Use them as-is or adapt them to fit your unique style and donor relationships. These lines help reinforce that you're not just asking for money—you're building a partnership.

1. “I wanted to check in because I know this cause means a lot to you.”
2. “I love hearing how you got involved in [cause]! What inspired you to start giving?”
3. “I thought of you when I saw this impact story—it reminded me of the difference you’re making.”
4. “You’re the kind of person who changes lives, and I just wanted to share a story that proves it.”
5. “I know you care deeply about [value/cause], and I wanted to share something I think you’ll love.”

6. “Your generosity is making a real difference—I’d love to share a quick update with you.”
7. “I was just reflecting on the incredible impact you had this year. Thank you for being part of this mission.”
8. “You and I both know how important this work is. I wanted to personally thank you for making it possible.”
9. “If there’s ever anything you’d like to see or hear more about from us, I’d love to make that happen.”
10. “I know you’ve been supporting [cause] for a while now—what keeps you passionate about it?”

Final Thought: Likability is About Authentic Connection

Fundraising isn’t just about asking for money; it’s about forming genuine human relationships.

When donors like you, they trust you.

When they trust you, they give.

And when they feel emotionally invested in your story, they keep giving.

The most likable fundraisers aren’t the smoothest talkers—they’re the ones who listen deeply, share powerfully, and invite donors into a meaningful story.

So, as you step into your next donor conversation, ask yourself:

How can I make this person feel valued, seen, and part of something bigger?

The answer to that question is the key to likability—and fundraising success.

Take Your Storytelling to the Next Level

Don’t just be liked—be unforgettable.

At the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference, you’ll learn from top experts how to craft stories that

captivate donors, build trust, and drive more generosity.

Join us to discover advanced storytelling strategies, connect with other passionate fundraisers, and leave with practical tools you can implement immediately.

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