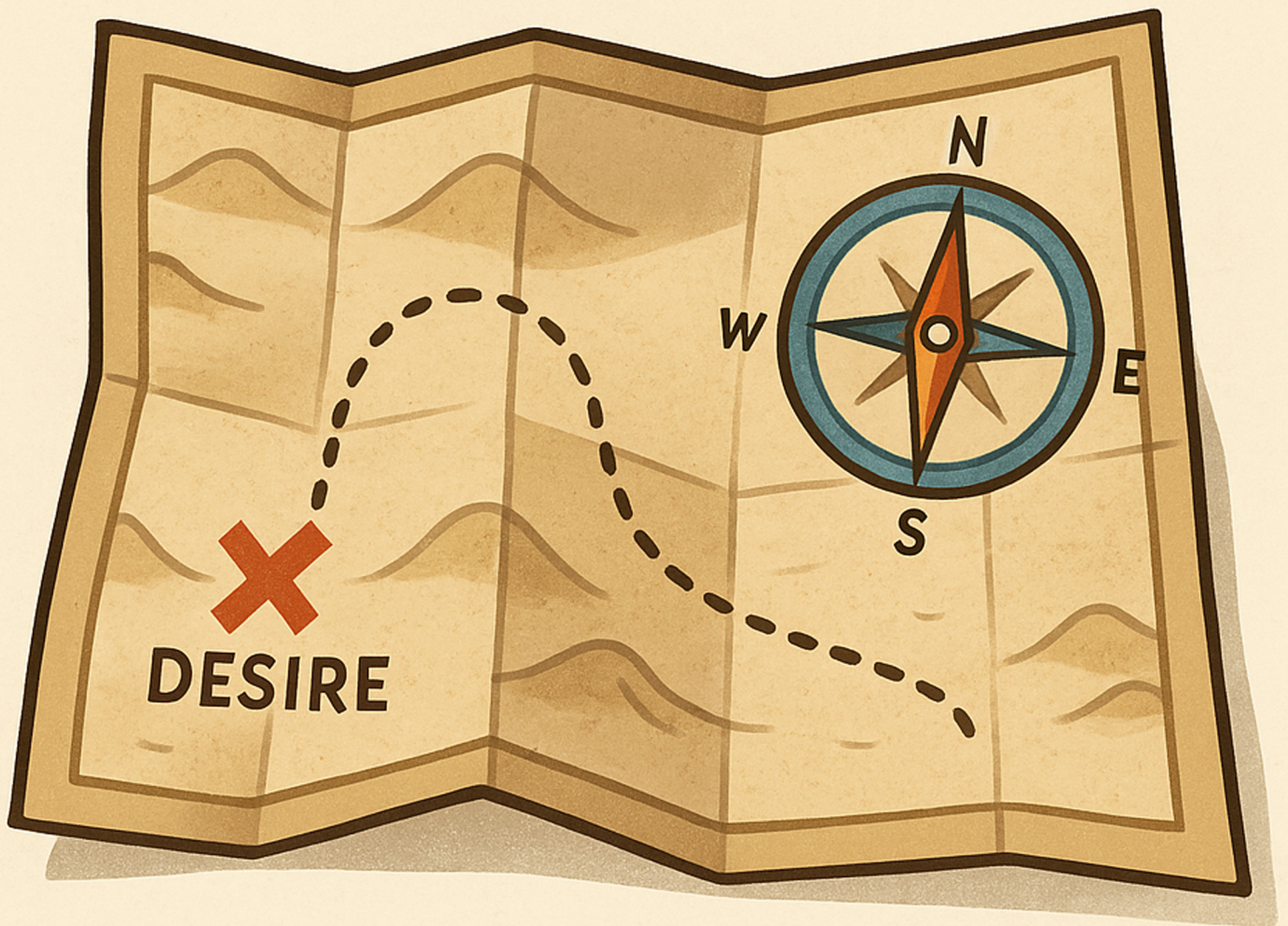


The Desire Compass

How to point your fundraising story in the right direction.



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Every great story starts with somebody who wants something.

That's the spark.

But here's what most fundraisers miss: we usually start with the *problem*.

"This child doesn't have enough food."

"This family doesn't have shelter."

"This forest is being destroyed."

And yes, the problem matters.

But here's the nuance I bet you haven't thought of: the problem only has meaning when it blocks a **desire**.

- A student wants to graduate... but tuition is in the way.
- A dog wants a home... but the shelter is overcrowded.
- A forest wants to grow back... but invasive weeds are choking the soil.

See how different that feels?

Suddenly it's not just a "case." It's a story you want to root for.

Why This Works

Desire is something everyone understands. We've all wanted something badly enough to feel it in our gut.

When you start your story with desire, three things happen fast:

1. Your beneficiary feels whole — not just a problem to fix, but someone (or something) to root for.
2. The problem has context — it matters because it's blocking the thing they want.
3. The donor's role is obvious — their action creates the turning point.

The Quick Trick

Try this. Next time you're working on a story, ask three simple questions:

1. **What do they want?**
 - "To graduate."
 - "To live without pain."
 - "To run clean again."
2. **What's in the way?**
 - "Bills."
 - "Cancer."
 - "Pollution."
3. **What can the donor do?**
 - "Provide the last scholarship that gets her a cap and gown."
 - "Give him treatment so he can walk his daughter down the aisle."
 - "Clean the river so kids can swim without fear."

That's it. Three beats. Desire → Obstacle → Donor action.

A Quick Example

"All Maria wanted was to graduate this spring. But tuition bills threatened to pull her out. Your gift puts her name on that diploma and her feet on the stage."

See the difference? The donor's gift doesn't just cover a bill — it creates a powerful, emotional outcome the donor can see.

Where To Use It

Once you write a story this way, you can use it everywhere:

- **Appeal letters:** Use it as your opening paragraph.
- **Emails:** Use it as your first three sentences.
- **Major donor meetings:** Use it as your pocket story — easy to remember, easy to tell.
- **Thank-yous & reports:** Close the loop: *"You didn't just give medicine — you gave James the chance to walk his daughter down the aisle."*

This is a tool you can use daily. Quick, repeatable, and donor-centered.

Try It Out

Let's walk through it together.

Grab one story you're working on and jot down three quick lines:

Line 1: What do they want?

Write it in simple, everyday words.

- "All Maria wants is to graduate this spring."
- "Max just wants a family to love him."
- "This forest longs to grow green again."

Line 2: What's in the way?

Name the obstacle. That's what creates the tension.

- "But tuition bills are standing in the way."
- "But overcrowding means his time is running out."
- "But invasive weeds are choking the soil."

Line 3: What can the donor do?

Show the action. Make it clear and emotional.

- "Your gift puts Maria's name on a diploma."
- "Your support gives Max a safe place until he's adopted."
- "Your donation plants the trees that bring the forest back to life."

Now read your three lines out loud.

That's the foundation for your next appeal.

Want More?

This is the kind of practical, "use it today" storytelling tool we share at the **Nonprofit Storytelling Conference**. It's all about raising more money — and feeling better doing it.

Visit <https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com> to learn more!