

EXCERPT



**RAISE
YOUR
VOICE**

A CAUSE MANIFESTO

Brian Sooy

“If you talk to a man
in a language
he understands,
that goes to his head.

If you talk to him
in *his* language,
that goes to his heart.”

NELSON MANDELA

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RAISE YOUR VOICE

A CAUSE MANIFESTO

Brian Sooy

RockBench | Nashville | 2014

Praise for *Raise Your Voice: a Cause Manifesto*

“Finally, a great marketing book for charitable organizations. Brian Sooy brings clarity and structure to the challenge of branding a cause.”

Marty Neumeier, *The Brand Gap*

“With *Raise Your Voice*, Brian Sooy has given designers, writers, and other creative professionals a highly relevant manifesto for cause-based and purpose-driven marketing. His ideas have important implications for leveraging the power of design to move people—in the nonprofit sector, higher education, and any other category where decisions are made with a blend of heart and mind.”

Bill Faust, Managing Partner, Ologie

“Now more than ever, effectiveness in the marketplace depends on our ability to rise above the noise and cut through the clutter. Brian Sooy provides a practical, design-driven approach for sharing your message with clarity and passion.”

Todd Henry, *Die Empty: Unleash Your Best Work Every Day*

“*Raise Your Voice* is a must-read for any organization that wants to align their message with their mission. You will learn how to create a culture that reinforces your organization’s reason for existence—the cause that drives all aspects of a nonprofit endeavor.”

Shannon D. Smith, Executive Director,
Wyoming Humanities Council

“Whether you’re passionate about making a difference in education, philanthropy, the arts, or the church, I strongly suggest you grab a highlighter and a cup of coffee, and read carefully through the hard-earned insights Brian shares. Trust me, you’re going to want to keep *Raise Your Voice* close at hand as you set about to change the world.”

Scott Humphreys, Writer/Editor, Research Planning
and Marketing Team at GoodSeed International

“Every church is passionate about clearly communicating their message and mission. *Raise Your Voice* gives ministry leaders all the tools to communicate effectively and be heard in a noisy world.”

Chet Beetler, Pastor, Christ Church, Ohio

“Part of what brings a donor to a cause is the hope of being part of a greater good. With *Raise Your Voice*, Brian Sooy gives nonprofits a means to go beyond being the loudest voice in the room to crafting a clear, articulate message which allows donors to see themselves as part of the solution.”

Julie Chase-Morefield, Executive Director,
Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio

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RockBench Publishing Corp.
6101 Stillmeadow Dr., Nashville, TN 37211
rockbench.com

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Printed in the United States of America

Published 2014 | First Printing

Published simultaneously in electronic format

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014931614

ISBN-13: 978-1-60544-029-3

Visit causemanifesto.org for resources, inspiration, and a complimentary Cause Manifesto poster that you can download.

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courageous thought leadership content

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For Lisa, you inspire me.

Sola gratia, Solus Christos, Soli Deo gloria.

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Preface	A Designer's (and Designed Thinking) Approach to Advancing Your Cause	x
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Part One

Chapter One	Seeking Clarity	1
Chapter Two	Ambassadors, Advocates, and Your Biggest Fans	6
Chapter Three	Inspiration Starts at the Top	12
Chapter Four	Knowing When to Raise Your Voice	18
Chapter Five	Repeating the Same Conversations	24
Chapter Six	You Are Here: the Cause Quadrant	34
Chapter Seven	Mission-Driven Design	46

Part Two

The Cause Manifesto		60
Chapter One	Be Strategic	64
Chapter Two	Be Focused	70
Chapter Three	Be Meaningful	80
Chapter Four	Be Insightful	86
Chapter Five	Be Inspiring	92
Chapter Six	Be Engaging	98
Chapter Seven	Be Social	106
Chapter Eight	Be Grateful	118
Chapter Nine	Be Trustworthy	130
Chapter Ten	Be Positive	136
Chapter Eleven	Be Powerful	146
Chapter Twelve	Be Courageous	156

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A Designer's (and Designed Thinking) Approach to Advancing Your Cause

This is not a how-to book.

It's not specifically a book about positioning, design, fundraising, marketing, or social media—although each of these topics are discussed, and an essential element of finding your voice and engaging your audience. There are an abundance of how-to resources available via the Internet, for free or for a small fee.

As you read, consider this book to be a series of conversations. It's my intention that they are thought-provoking conversations, to influence you to change the way you think, and perhaps motivate you to act in a different way.

Isn't that your goal? To change the way people think, and change their behavior, in response to your meaningful cause?

I've talked with nonprofit leaders, executive directors, marketing and communications officers, development directors,

volunteers, and board members. We all share one thing in common: to make a meaningful and lasting difference in our communities and in the world. I'm confident that every reader will find insights that will help them advance their cause.

This is a book about communicating better: speaking with one voice on behalf of a meaningful cause. It's about finding clarity. It's about telling inspiring and informative stories about outcomes and impact that create credibility. This book will give you insight into how to connect your purpose and mission with people whose values you share, and to bring meaning to their lives as they become ambassadors for your cause. It's about earning trust, and building relationships.

It's a book that will help you find your voice.

The heart may inspire you to start a journey, and your mind will guide you along the path. You must begin your journey with the end in mind. Every step along the way, every decision made, must be on the path between where you start and the goal you seek to accomplish at the end of your journey.

Mission-driven design will guide you to your goal, as a catalyst for cause communications that empowers you to connect with your audience. It will help you assess your progress and keep your eye focused on the destination. It is a compass to keep you on the path of communicating with clarity.

Design thinking is a guide to help you be aware of the context, consistency, and continuity of your marketing and communications, in light of the outcomes of your mission.

The journey is long; fulfilling your purpose and achieving your mission is the destination. Be certain you know where you are going so you can recognize it when you arrive.

Be Grateful.

We will express
our gratitude to our
supporters, remembering
that their gifts are
meaningful and their
generosity makes a
difference.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

I've attended different local churches all of my life. My wife and I recently started attending a church minutes from our home. To our surprise, we received a personal thank you from this church for a donation we made in addition to our regular giving. The regular practice for a church is to send a year-end letter acknowledging financial donations. Most likely, the letter is generated as a form letter, personalized (but not personal), and sent in a #10 envelope.

My wife and I consider ourselves to be generous people. We support meaningful causes. We think of money as a means to bless others. We volunteer and hold leadership positions where we serve. We think of our time and talents as more valuable than money. We've received personal thank you notes from other organizations after we made a donation, but this was the *first* instance that we received such a note from a church for a gift we had made.

It was both wonderful and unsettling.



It was wonderful because we were on the receiving end of gratitude and sincere thankfulness. Our gift was as meaningful to the church as it was to us.

It was unsettling, because it made me realize that other churches we had attended considered our giving as a duty, where a year-end form letter was sufficient.

Our values are such that we volunteer and support the causes we believe in with a generous spirit, not from a sense of duty. We give because it is meaningful to us and we believe in the cause—not because it is expected. We want to support the organizations that speak on behalf of the causes we believe in.

Of course, it would be a logistical challenge for a church that relies on weekly giving to send out a thank you note every week—or *would* it? How could it powerfully transform the connection the donor has to their church and the cause it represents, if gratitude were expressed every week?

I am proud to have served for many years on the board of Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio. I am always impressed that *every* donor receives a personally signed thank you card, for every donation that is made. The notes are sent because the gift was meaningful to the donor, and the thank you note is an acknowledgment that the gift is meaningful to the Food Bank.

Small actions often speak louder than big words. A thank you note leaves an impression that will last for years. The most recent impression you make may be the most memorable.

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

It's not always what you say, it's often how you say it. Consider again that all communications are donor communications.

You may be thinking that there is a question of scale—not every donor is an individual, and not every donation can be acknowledged in the same way. What about grants? What about major gifts? What about capital campaigns? Every gift must be acknowledged, and never ignored. The acknowledgment should be appropriate to the gift. Some gifts warrant thank you notes or letters. Larger gifts might warrant a personal call or letter from the executive director or a board member.

A colleague shared: “When I get busy and need to refocus, I write thank you notes.”

Transformational gifts might require that you name a building, or offer another form of personal recognition.

Ask the supporter why they are making the gift, and what it means to them. Ask them what they might be expecting in return (if anything). Never assume anything. You won't know what their true motivation is until you ask—whether it's altruistic or for seeking personal recognition—or somewhere in between.

You won't know a supporter's specific motivation until you ask. If you ask, you will be able to express the organization's gratitude for the gift in a way that is most meaningful to the donor (and you'll be able to gather relevant data as to why your supporters get involved with and donate to your cause).

Regardless of the type of donation, every donation must be acknowledged. It's not about whether it's convenient for your organization, or if there is no process in place. Being



grateful is a principle that acknowledges to your supporters that their gifts are meaningful. Gratefulness recognizes that the gift is important and will make a difference. Being grateful is about how the donor feels about giving, not about the gift itself. Gratefulness is a cultural practice.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

Let me share another story with you, about why being grateful matters.

During the course of a project, my firm chose to make a gift-in-kind donation of services for the program with which we were working. We recognize the importance and value of the mission of the program, and are fully committed to the cause it represents.

The project on which we were working was extensive; a significant change in scope went beyond the budget that had been approved, and for which we would be paid. We chose to continue our work and complete the project on a pro bono basis, with the intent to report the work as a gift-in-kind donation.

The goal was to enhance the perception of the program as a leader in its area of influence, and we felt compelled to contribute to that goal. By all measures, the project was a success, and improved the perception of the program to its stakeholders (including a major grantmaking organization)—not only regionally, but also nationally.

As is our policy, and at our client's request, we wrote a letter outlining our gift-in-kind donation, and explained our decision to make the equivalent of a five-figure contribution of strategic and creative services. The program office

acknowledged receipt of the letter, and forwarded a copy to the parent organization for recording of the donation.

Then we waited.

One, two, three weeks went by. I started thinking that it was unusual that we had not received even a simple acknowledgment of the contribution. We considered our gift to be an important and significant contribution. We waited one more week, and in the fifth week reached out to the program office to inquire as to whether or not our letter was even received by the parent organization.

As it turned out, neither the parent organization staff nor the leadership seemed to be aware of the donation—or the letter. A short while later we received what was clearly a form thank you letter, with a computer-generated signature of the parent organization's president. Most likely, the individual is still unaware of our gift.

Needless to say, I was disappointed. I understand our gift was not monetary. What was a meaningful, generous gift of services was absorbed into the organization without consideration.

The thank you became meaningless, and my affinity for and belief in the cause changed that day.

A relationship that had been stewarded and nurtured over many years was tarnished by the oversight of something as simple as recognition and acknowledgment of this donation. The leadership did not recognize the significance of the donation to my business, and my family, as the donor. Not only do I have the perception that the gift was not meaningful to them, but in my mind the perception was also created that they did not recognize it was meaningful to me.



Do you have a similar story in your life where the expectation of gratefulness was met with indifference?

It doesn't have to be this way.

We also support a different nonprofit through design and marketing services. The relationship with this organization had become one in which I thought our gifts of time and resources were unappreciated and taken for granted. A newly-appointed leader of this organization specifically called to ask if we would be willing to continue our support, instead of assuming that we were still interested. He took the time to meet with me and explain that our help was crucial to their cause, and asked if we would be willing to continue our work. Since then, I've received thank you notes and verbal acknowledgments of appreciation for the work we've done. This leader recognized that our gifts are meaningful and, through his expressions of gratitude, reminded me that they are appreciated. *That's the way it should be.*

A SACRED TRUST

Gratefulness is a sacred trust: donors *choose* to support organizations whose purpose upholds the values they hold most important, and whose mission they believe in. Gratefulness is a character quality, and is expressed in the culture of your organization.

The values that represent a cause are expressed in the character of your organization. Organizations have purpose, expressed through their character and acted on through their culture.

Donors and supporters entrust you with their values through the donation of time or money or services. What you



We are grateful, and recognize our supporters' gifts are meaningful and make a difference. **#beGrateful**
#causemanifesto

do with it, how you hold the trust sacred, how you acknowledge it—sends a message about how meaningful their gift is. When a gift is not acknowledged or service is not recognized, you're not just demeaning a donor's gift, you're rejecting their values.

Philanthropy, development, and stewardship would be transformed if every advocate, ambassador, and fundraiser understood the true gift that is given is the supporter's trust. Money, services, or time is an accompaniment to that gift, and evidence of the donor's commitment.

Fundraising relationships will be transformed when you realize what you are asking a donor to do is trust you to manage their investment for a measurable impact. Money, or any other gift, is just proof of the exchange.

The trust a supporter gives an organization is more important than the donation that accompanies it.

STEWARDSHIP

Even if a gift or donation isn't meaningful to the organization—it's always of primary importance to the donor. How it is acknowledged will affect the relationship forever. Every gift or act of support comes with the supporter's hope



and expectation of making an impact. Acknowledging the impact that the gift has made, or will make, is essential to stewardship.

The fact that our in-kind donation was overlooked may have been an oversight; it may have been a breakdown in process; it may be that there is no process at all. In any organization, there should be a clearly defined process in place—from the board, to the executive level, to the fundraising level, to the staff—a policy and process of what must occur when any donation is made.

Think about any organization you are involved with. Are you aware of what occurs after a donation is made? How a nonprofit responds after a donation is made is critical to the stewardship of the donor relationship.

STEWARDSHIP STARTS AT THE BEGINNING

Consider the many types of tax exempt entities who accept donations: churches, charities, foundations, colleges, universities, and schools. Each accepts donations of different monetary amounts, and in different ways. In churches and faith-based organizations there is an expectation of giving. Based on interpretation of religious doctrine, a percentage is anticipated. At times, a church member's commitment to the cause may even be evaluated based on that percentage.

Colleges and universities solicit funding from alumni and the community—communicating the core values of the institution, in order to project values that align with these stakeholders. Their marketing and outreach also seeks to appeal to potential supporters' interest in education, economic development, athletics, research, the arts, or any other

initiative that the institution has as part of its mission.

Foundations seek gifts to create impact-based grants, awarding support to charities and meaningful causes that apply for funding from the foundations, the community, and individuals.

We tend to see gratitude as a one-time activity that is accomplished once a thank-you note is sent. But when it comes to stewarding donors, why not consider it as an ongoing process? Never pass up an opportunity to say thank you and engage a donor at a deeper level.

- Gratefulness must be part of your tone of voice in all communication touch points.
- Volunteers must be affirmed and thanked for the gift of their time in support of your cause, no matter where, when, or how they serve. All volunteer time is important, don't take any of it for granted.
- Begin the process of thanking every individual in the same way you thank institutional grant-making donors. A personally signed thank you from the executive director, president, or CEO is meaningful, and greatly appreciated by any donor. Sign it in a different color of ink to show its authenticity.
- Reach out to advocates and engage them enthusiastically in social media. Have a conversation. Say thank you. Ask questions.

Think of your own experience:

- What frame of mind are you in when you are likely to make a donation? What are your expectations once the donation is made?



- Are you expecting a thank you?
- Is email sufficient?
- Would a personal note be more meaningful?
- Would a personal phone call make you feel that your donation really mattered?

The largest of national and regional nonprofits will have mostly automated processes for acknowledging donations; these will be personalized as much as possible and will project the appearance of personalization. There are an abundance of local nonprofits, from charities to churches to colleges, that could benefit from truly personalized expressions of thanks, appropriate to the size and type of donation.

A personal thank you says "We appreciate your donation. We're thankful that our mission is important to you, and that you want to support the cause we represent. We are committed to be good stewards of your donation, and our ongoing relationship with you is as meaningful as the investment you have made in us."

When an individual understands how their values align with your organization's values and the cause it represents, their participation and support gives them more than an opportunity to be involved—it gives them a story to share; a point of connection; and personal meaning. Supporters of all types want to be invited into a relationship (attracted); welcomed (informed); and made to feel like they are part of something bigger (inspired and engaged). Your organization may be small

(or, maybe it's not!); the cause it represents is large.

Donor engagement is a sophisticated phrase for what should be called relationship building. All marketing and communications are for donor engagement and relationship building. No matter how large or small your nonprofit's staff or board is, every individual, every outreach activity and type of communication serves as a potential opportunity for relationship building.

An intentionally designed process for expressing gratefulness in a meaningful way will enhance those relationships. Design it, build it into your day-to-day activity, and gratitude will become an irreplaceable part of your culture.

Build trusting relationships. Connect your cause and your mission with your audience through design touch points, words, and experiences. Trust, engagement, and donations will follow.

KEY INSIGHTS

Be grateful, and acknowledge that the gift is as meaningful to your cause as it is to the donor. Focus on the donor experience to make the process as conversational and meaningful as possible. Keep it simple, and provide assurance that the transaction is safe and secure. Express gratitude for the contribution on screen, via email, and through a personal thank-you note in the mail. The true gift that is given is the supporter's trust. Money, services, or time is an accompaniment to that gift.



Resources

From the Preface

Nonprofit Answer Guide, a project of Center for Nonprofit Management (nonprofitanswerguide.org)

From Part One: Chapter Four

The organization to which I refer is the Samuel Szabo Foundation (samuelszabofoundation.org)

From Part One: Chapter Five

- Giving USA research (givingusareports.org)
- Hootsuite.com
- Twitonomy.com
- Joomla! (joomla.org)

From Part One: Chapter Six

- *The Communication Toolkit*, from Cause Communications
<http://www.causecommunications.org/download-signup.php?id=toolkit>
- The web address for the NTEE Classification System was shortened; the full address is
<http://nccs.urban.org/classification/NTEE.cfm>
- *Leap of Reason*, by Mario Morino (leapofreason.org)

From Part One: Chapter Seven

IDEO's free Human-Centered Design Toolkit
(ideo.com/work/human-centered-design-toolkit/)

From Part Two: Chapter Four

- The web address for Dan Pallotta's TED talk was shortened; the full address is
ted.com/talks/dan_pallotta_the_way_we_think_about_charity_is_dead_wrong.html
- Charity Navigator: charitynavigator.org
- GuideStar: guidestar.org
- Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance Standards for Charity Accountability: bbb.org/charity-reviews
- Klout: klout.com

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For additional resources, visit causemanifesto.org

Acknowledgments

I have learned that books do not flow forth from the writer's fingers like a spring, but grow like a bonsai tree. This book was a slow sculpture, carefully and diligently tended, trimmed, and pruned. The writing, design, and editing took 18 months; the preparation took 30 years.

I'm very grateful to my wife and business partner, Lisa Sooy, for her unwavering support. Thank you for the freedom to write on so many Saturday mornings. Thank you for trusting me, and taking the risk with me to launch Aespire. I could not do this without you.

I appreciate the opportunity to work with leaders, board members, volunteers, and colleagues within the nonprofit community, both personally and professionally. Your passion and dedication to the causes you believe in are boundless. You are making a difference.

I would not have considered writing this book, had it not been for the suggestion of David C. Baker. I trust I have risen to the challenge you set forth, and this is a book of which you and the RockBench authors can be proud. I do not know what prompted you to challenge me to write it. This book is proof that the work you do matters.

Thank you to Blair Enns for the coaching and encouragement, as we both realized that expertise plus perspective creates credibility. In my persistence, I have become a smarter student. You're an excellent teacher.

I appreciate the creativity, endless patience, and exquisite attention to detail provided by designer Vance Williams. Thank you for putting my commas in the correct places.

Thank you to Matt Dray, Robert Slatt, and Vance Williams for your dedication to Aespire and the causes we serve.

Thank you to Julie Chase-Morefield, Denver Daniel, Scott Humphreys, Patty O'Brien, and so many others for your feedback and insights on this work. Thank you to the reviewers, who gave freely of their time and shared their honest assessments of my work.

Thank you to Brian Frederick, Frank Whitfield, and those who helped refine the principles of the Cause Manifesto.

Thank you to Bev for reading my blog and telling me how the Manifesto made a difference to you.

And last, but not least, this book would not have been written without vast amounts of hazelnut coffee.

Be Grateful.

Colophon

Cover and Interior Design

Vance Williams, Aespire®

Designed with Adobe InDesign CC and Adobe Illustrator CC

Typefaces for the Type Lovers

- Titling typeface: Avenir, designed by Adrian Frutiger, 1988 for LinoType GmbH
- Body typeface: PMN Caecilia, designed by Peter Matthias Noordzij, 1983 for LinoType GmbH

Proofreading and Editing

Vance Williams and Donna McGuire

The author's last name is pronounced soy, as in *soy bean* or *soy sauce*. All other similarities end there.



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Every day, meaningful causes are trying to rise above the noise and be heard. Is your nonprofit or philanthropy one of them? *Raise Your Voice* is an exploration of mission-driven design and the touch points that are meaningful to your audience. It explores a framework for understanding how your cause is represented by your organization's unique personality and distinctive voice.

"Finally, a great marketing book for charitable organizations. Brian Sooy brings clarity and structure to the challenge of branding a cause."

MARTY NEUMEIER,
THE BRAND GAP

The resolutions of the Cause Manifesto are timeless principles that align how an organization communicates its values through its purpose, character, culture, and unique voice. These twelve strategic, inspirational, relational, and aspirational principles will transform your culture and empower you to communicate more powerfully and effectively.

The principles of mission-driven design, and the resolutions of the Cause Manifesto, are a call to be courageous as you inspire your audience and connect them with your mission.

This book is for anyone who supports and believes in a meaningful cause. It's full of insights for executive directors, communication officers, grant and program managers, development directors and fundraising professionals. Share it with your board members, grantees, and volunteers. Encourage the organizations that you support and believe in to apply the principles, and make them part of its culture.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Sooy is an entrepreneur, design professional, volunteer, donor, and nonprofit board member. He is the principal of Aespire,[®] a design and cause communications firm that helps nonprofits and philanthropies communicate with clarity.



Visit causemanifesto.org or aespire.com for more inspiration.



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