

# DRIVING PARTICIPATION

*with Beth Brodovsky*



## SESSION 042

### STOP COMBINING ASKING AND THANKING

#### WITH LYNNE WESTER

**Beth:** Hello. This is Beth Brodovsky and welcome to Driving Participation. I am here today with Lynne Wester, the donor relations guru and the author of “The Four Pillars of Donor Relations.” Thank you so much for joining me, Lynne.

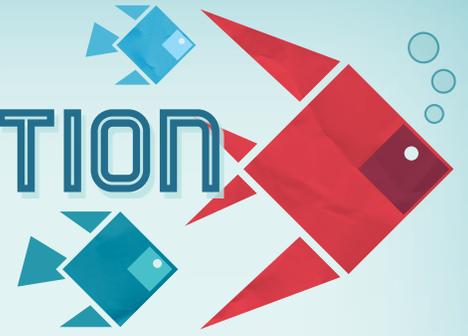
**Lynne:** Thanks, Beth. I’m excited to be here.

**Beth:** Lynne just recently presented on The Fundraising Summit. I had a chance to catch her presentation, and it was so fabulous I knew I had to get her on the show so that anybody who might have missed the Summit had a chance to hear some of the things that she had to say. She’s going to talk today about people’s tendency to combine asking and thanking at the same time. We’re going to get into that a little bit later, but we’re going to start by Lynne telling me a little bit about how you wandered into this world of donor communications.

**Lynne:** I don’t think anybody or many of us, especially my generation, majored in donor relations or fundraising although now I have a masters in the field. As an undergrad I studied foreign languages so completely unattached to philanthropy. When I went back to graduate school, I had a professor who stopped me one day after class and he said “You’re a really talented writer,” and I said “Thanks.” That’s good coming from the guy who is giving me a grade today. He said “Have you ever thought about getting into development?” At the time I lived in Florida and it was before the recession and I said “No, I really don’t like real estate,” and I had no idea what he meant by “development” and he did, and he had a clear idea of what he wanted me to do, and so he said “No, I’m talking fundraising,” and I said “Well I can fundraise. I mean it’s not that hard. It’s kind of like sales, but not, right?” and he’s like “Yeah, not so much. I’m going to introduce you to the vice president of institutional advancement.” Two days later I was in her office and he introduced me to her and I started my career in fundraising and development for higher ed by working in corporation and foundation relations writing stewardships and grants. That’s how I ended up and from there I spent the last almost fifteen years in fundraising on the donor relations side showing our donors why we care and

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why their gifts matter. It's been a great career. I love it. It's not just my career, it's my vocation so I'm proud to have this as my career.

**Beth:** I'm so always excited for anyone that finds their passion, finds the thing they love getting up for every day because I feel so blessed that I'm the same way. Not everybody is given that gift and not everybody takes the time to seek it out. I think that's awesome and I hope everyone that's listening feels the same that Lynne does. One of the things I think is important to start out with is this word "participation" that I use all the time. It really does mean different things to different people. In your world and in the work that you do, how is participation important?

**Lynne:** I come from a higher ed background. It's my specialty, higher ed and healthcare, but mainly higher education. For us participation means having an engaged alumni base. When we look at an organization that's healthy in higher education, we're looking at not just participating in the giving process in the philanthropic process, but also in the what it takes to be an engaged alum and be a participant in the entire university. It's great that you've graduated and you've moved on to a different part of your life, but also understanding that you have a deep and meaningful connection for the place where most folks spent four great years of their lives. I always say about my alma mater "It was the best four years of my life." I'm still trying to get back there so I just hang out at universities for a living.

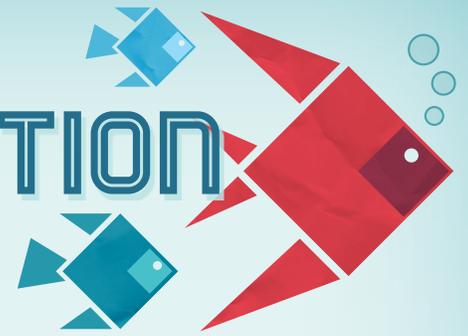
**Beth:** I say the same thing.

**Lynne:** Participation can mean anything from an annual fund gift to volunteering to coming back for homecoming and reunions to mentoring new alumni or getting career networks together to "Hey how about you just open the email." That would be a great first start. For me, it's a broad, broad definition.

**Beth:** Right. We're going to get into — probably at the end — some of the things that are really working, but I think one of the interesting things you can talk about in a unique way is some things that people are doing that's really hurting them and causing problems with building the kind of engagement and attachment people need to get involved and begin to participate. Let's talk about what you're seeing right now as the biggest mistakes people are making in donor relations and communications.

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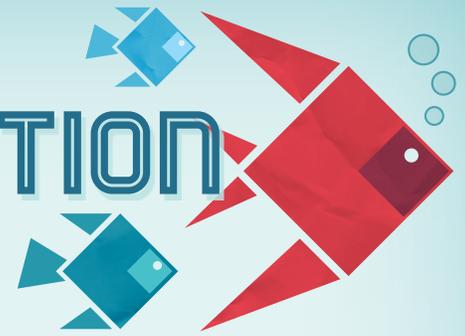
**Lynne:** I think we have a couple of key problems in donor relations and a lot of it stems from the fact that our leadership has told us we need to get dollars and donors in the door and that we need more and more of that as we go along. While that's true, one of the things that has been lost in that is the idea that we actually have to hold on to the dollars and donors that we have. We can't just keep churning them over and over and that has really shown itself in the past couple of years because our retention rates in this country are horrible so if we look at first time donor average retention rate in the United States, it's 27 percent. Seven out of ten of our donors make one gift and never ever come back again. If we were in business, we would be out of business in the first three months. It's not sustainable and the biggest cause of that is because we don't actually stop, take the time to appreciate the gift that we've gotten from the alum or the donor and say thank you, tell them what their gift did and then we ask them again after we've built a relationship. We're very quick to turn on our relationships and instead say "Yes, but is there more" and by not having an attitude of gratitude as I call it, a real center on that there's a person behind that gift and behind that person is someone who desires a relationship with us, obviously they've participated, they've engaged with us, but it's not about us. It's about them and we kind of have to get over ourselves. I can't tell you how many pieces I read a year that say we've done this and we've done that and we're so fabulous and I'm like "OK, but that doesn't tell me anything about your relationship with that donor." I think that's really a mistake that we're making. We're so busy trying to ask for money that we don't actually pause and take the time out to go through the ritual of being grateful.

**Beth:** I love that you say that especially because you and I have very similar practices areas. Our focus is very much on education and on healthcare as well. One of the biggest things I've seen especially pervasive in education is the feeling — it seems like a lot of people in education donor relations focus on the fact that the message from a school has to be "We're great. You should be proud to be a graduate here and so everything we need to do is to scare you into thinking that if you don't give, the value of your degree is going to go down and so you need to give us money to perpetuate our greatness and your greatness by way of us." I would love your opinion on that.

**Lynne:** Yeah, it's like the doomsday scenario that other nonprofits run where they say "If you don't give \$100 Jimmy's going to die" or something. It's the Sarah McLachlan ads with the dogs in it that I just can't watch.

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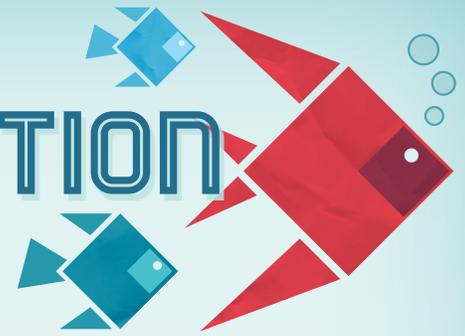


**Beth:** A lot of people in that charitable kind of fundraising say that's what you have to do and that's what works. I guess what I'm curious about, because you specialize in higher education, is does that work? It's interesting to see that it's saying that you're equating the "Give us money or your degree is valueless" methodology is equated to "Give us money or Johnny's going to die."

**Lynne:** Right and that used to work maybe twenty years ago, but our donor population has changed and our techniques have not changed along with them. I'm seeing that not just in the higher education sphere, but in the nonprofit sphere. Those same people that are cranking out those eight page fundraising letter with the P.S.s in the #10 envelopes, that's so 1984 and I appreciate now that Warwick and all those people who wrote those letters had a scientific proof behind it, but even the best letter in the world is still going to get you 2% return on investment. What I'd rather you do is invest in story telling and invest in getting your message across in a way that's meaningful to your donor base, but the doomsday scenario we've proven doesn't work and that was written a long time ago for what used to be an uneducated population. People that tend to buy into those doomsday scenarios tend to be uneducated, faith based believers meaning "if I just do this then everything will take care of itself" and when you're dealing with a higher education population, they're already educated because you've already done that for them. That's half of your goal, to educate your population, but also understand that whether you like it or not, it's not about the university. It's about the donor and the alumni and their relationship with the university and by saying "well if you don't give we drop in the US News and World report rankings". Okay, that doesn't affect me because I've already graduated. Also if we look at the modern population, we look at all these billionaires who dropped out of college. Some people are like "wait, I'm carrying a couple hundred thousands in debt. This math isn't adding up." I think our donor population has changed, but our techniques have not changed and I think that's a huge problem. I always tell people if you're sending an appeal in a #10 envelope, I'm 37 years old and I've never ever written a check for a donation and I've given hundreds of thousands of dollars away. If you're expecting me to reply with a check, it's just not going to happen. You've got to push me online because that's where I give my money, but you have to know that and understand that about me and also understand that I go down and check my mail when I get home. There's a huge recycling bin in my mailroom in my apartment complex and if it doesn't draw me, if it doesn't pull me in, all my bills come online so why would I open your envelope?

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**Beth:** That is really fascinating because I have heard people say you should send your direct mail in a window envelope because it looks like a bill and people put bills in their “important and must deal with this” category. One of my questions is you’re 37, I’m 48 and a lot of common donors are 68 or 69 — so much older than both of us. Are you saying that you think people need to be segmenting their tactic to the age or the message or what?

**Lynne:** I think they need to be segmenting based on past behavior. I was reading a tweet yesterday from the Case District I Conference, which is an educational district in Boston.

**Beth:** I’m heading out to District II on Sunday.

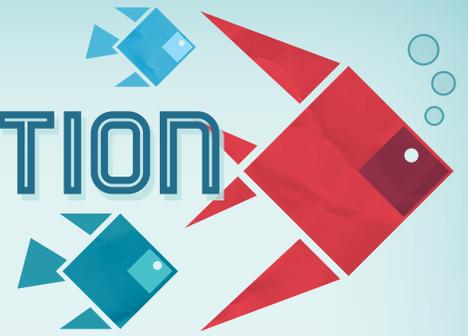
**Lynne:** They were saying that the number one way folks 65 and older gave to higher education last year was online. I think our old thought around “Well, this is how older folks give,” I think we need to re-evaluate that. What I tend to do is if you’ve given online in the past, then we need to talk to you digitally. If you’ve given in the mail, then we need to talk to you in the mail. If you’ve given on the phone, then we need to talk to you on the phone. Don’t base it on some abstract assumption you have about me based on my age or my socio-economic status. It’s interesting because we’ve started to do that in other ways. In our research shops, we’ve moved away from well screenings and instead moved towards propensity screenings because “Just because I’m rich doesn’t mean I’m going to give.”

**Beth:** I’ve never heard that term before. Talk a little bit more about that.

**Lynne:** Sophisticated fundraising operations, we’ve stopped looking at whether you have money or not because you can be rich and never give a dime, and we’ve started looking at do we want to focus on people with wealth or do we want to focus on people with wealth who are philanthropic, and I definitely want to focus on people who are philanthropic just over someone who is wealthy because just because you have money doesn’t mean you’re going to give it away. We’re really changing our model, but yet we haven’t changed our solicitation models. It’s having given last year, but not this year, having given some years, but not this year. That’s the shallowest way to look at a person, and it doesn’t tell me anything. If we base our donor relations on amount and not behavior, amount should be the last thing we focus on, but we still focus on that number one, and I’m saying that’s the exact opposite way and that’s

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why we lose donors, because a \$25 donor never gets any what I call love, and they never have a chance to become a \$5 million donor because we've treated them like they're \$25 to us and not \$5 million. If we look at statistics, Michael Bloomberg's first ever gift was two years after he graduated Hopkins, he gave a \$25 annual fund gift.

**Beth:** Wow, who knew?

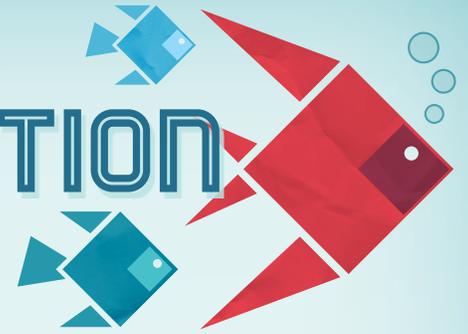
**Lynne:** So if we ignore the \$25 Bloomberg and we only pay attention to the \$5 million or \$5 billion one, it's not sustainable. My thing is don't segment on age, don't segment on whether I gave last year or not. Segment me on my past behavior. Am I a loyal donor? Those are your number one plan giving donors. Am I a solely online donor? If I'm an online donor and you mail me a solicitation and it's not. I love postcards so my alma mater at the University at South Carolina does a wonderful job. They know I'm an online donor. They know that's how I give so most of my solicitations come in online, but once a year maybe if I haven't made my annual fund gift, they'll send me a beautifully, visually stunning post card and on the back it will say "Go online to give.sc.edu now" so they're taking print and driving me digital, which they know is my behavior anyway.

**Beth:** Wow. If you're a smaller organization that may be listening to this right now that thinks "That would be nice to be able to segment that way," what would you say to them about either the value of figuring out or finding out how to do some of that? You know, it's just not realistic to have that level of segmentation data if you're a smaller organization. What would you say would be the number one thing you think somebody should focus on if they don't have the budget to do everything 100 percent the way you would recommend?

**Lynne:** The first thing they need to focus on is their first-time donors. They need to pull their first-time donor attention rate, find out what it is and make a vow to increase retaining those first-time donors because if I never get a second gift, I'm never going to get a major gift. They should put in a program where we welcome every first-time donor. Maybe a postcard, maybe a phone call, maybe an email. I think regardless of the amount, I don't care if they gave you \$50,000 as their first gift or \$5. Everybody wants to feel special so it's about noticing that behavior and saying "You're different and you stood out to us. This is your first gift. We hope you stick around. Here's the impact of your gift." Same thing for loyal donors. A couple of my clients, one of the things we're doing is we're taking - at one university we have a list of 240

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people who have given 20 or more years consecutively, never missed a year and it doesn't matter the amount. The president of the university over the next 365 days is going to reach out to every single one of those 240 people.

**Beth:** That means lots of people; that personal effort.

**Lynne:** That's the biggest head honcho you can have. I mean technically at a university calling a person who may have given \$10 a year for 20 years, but that may be a larger portion of their income than the person who gave one big check once because they sold their business.

**Beth:** Right, exactly, and they had that moment because you have no idea what that \$10 a year for 20 years, who knows what they're capable of.

**Lynne:** That's someone who really cares about your organization because they took the time and effort to put in there. Like I said, if I'm a small nonprofit I start with first-time donors. Then I go to loyal donors. Then I go just on behavior and I just stop looking at amount and I start treating people based on how they treat us and then the returns come and they come very quickly.

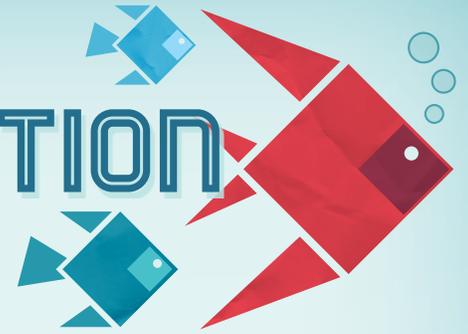
**Beth:** Is there one method that works better than another? If you're saying if you can't do everything and the only people you can really pay special attention to and focus on getting them on what they want would be these first-time donors. What would you say would be the best, I mean that's a strategy, tactically, what would you recommend would be one of the best things that somebody could do as a tactic to start taking action on that strategy?

**Lynne:** Once a month someone in your organization should pull a list of your first-time donors and how their gift came in, which is very easy. If you're pulling those lists anyway to write thank you letters, then you know how their gift came in: online, in the mail. How did it come in? Thank appropriate to how it came in and here's the great thing about first-time donor programs. You only have to design that collateral once because they're never going to get it again.

**Beth:** Exactly. It's people like that that talk about their color. It will be a college that has their

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university color and the staff will say “Does it have to be purple again?” and it’s a new batch of 16 year olds you’re marketing out to.

**Lynne:** Right and they’re never going to get it twice so it’s completely fine. You build an email, you build a postcard and you build a phone call script and whatever way they give, that’s the way you thank them. It’s that once a month effort that the staff joins together that attitude of gratitude and it’s also one of the things I love doing so I do a lot of board training and boards always tell me “I don’t want to fundraise,” and I say “Great, then you can thank donors?” At the beginning of every board meeting we put those donors in front of board members and we say “Here’s the list. Do you want to write them handwritten notes? Do you want to pick up the phone? Do you want to send them an email? Let’s get out there in front of these donors.” That’s a great board activity.

**Beth:** I love that. Thank them the way they give. I’ve not heard anyone say it just like that and to pre-prep a phone script, a printed piece and an email piece so that they’re ready to go to match the way that somebody gave, that is such a great simple idea that anybody at any budget point could take advantage of.

**Lynne:** Exactly and it’s not like you have to execute on all of those. That’s why God invented volunteers.

**Beth:** Exactly, I say the same thing about my interns.

**Lynne:** At universities, that’s a student worker job. They pull the address labels, they put them on the postcards and out the door they go.

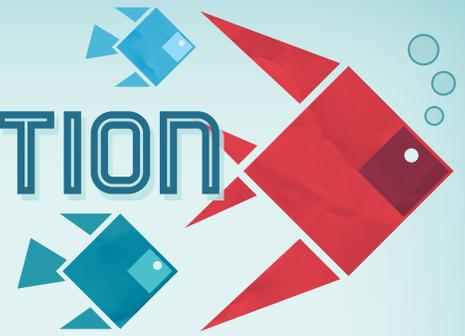
**Beth:** Right and the whole point of those jobs is to teach people what they don’t want to do for the rest of their lives.

**Lynne:** Well, there’s one thing, but also it’s teaching that student that attitude of gratitude that money came from somewhere.

**Beth:** Exactly. That’s to get them involved and actually seeing this is what it takes to fund your

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education. It's amazing. Let's move into talking about thanking because I know that you have a lot of really important thoughts that people need to hear about the process of thanking.

**Lynne:** I didn't know this, but you say how did you wander into this profession. My mom had prepared me for this job when I was knee high to a grasshopper.

**Beth:** Oh you're so southern!

**Lynne:** Yes, I'm southern. Growing up, I had to write thank you notes before I could play with anything I received. On Christmas Day, I would sit there in a ball of tears and I would write thank you notes while I was staring at my Barbie Dreamhouse that I really wanted to play with. I would have to write a note to Santa or anybody else and my mom would teach me how to express gratitude so I couldn't just say "Dear Santa, thank you for the Barbie Dreamhouse. I will play with it." There had to be something in it about "I love the elevator" or "I love her car and now it has a parking space." You had to bring out something unique about the gift you had received, but she also taught me that true gratitude comes from being grateful and not asking for more. I think somewhere along the way, somebody in nonprofit said "We've got to hurry up and get the second gift. When we're thanking them why don't we ask them for another gift" and somehow that has become part of the culture. I've seen everything from in the thank you letter saying "You can always do more" and then with the receipt putting a business reply envelope or a tear off sheet that says "Here's how to make your next gift" and there's nothing that's more destructive to donor retention than asking for the next gift before you've even gotten thank you out of your mouth. I was with a client a couple of weeks ago and they said "Don't put the BREs in with the receipt?" and I said "No, it's like this. You write your handwritten note to grandma. Dear Grandma, Thank you so much for my Cabbage Patch Doll. I will love it and hug it and play with it. By the way, my birthday's coming up, and I'm thinking Rainbow Brite is looking really cool. How about that, Grandma? Chop, chop!" Now nobody would ever send that handwritten note to Grandma because Grandma would kill you and you'd never get another gift and your mom would be embarrassed, but we do it to our donors. We say thank you for your gift. I do a giving challenge. Every Giving Tuesday I give to 20-30 organizations and I can't tell you how many times I receive an email saying "Thank you for your gift. Click here to make another donation." Really? You haven't even processed my

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credit card yet. You haven't and by the way, you also haven't told me what my gift's going to do. You have to do two things in order to get me to give again. You have to thank me and you have to tell me what my money is going to do, and until you've done those two things, you cannot ask me for more. You cannot. That's breaking a covenant that we had together in this relationship. You're treating me like an ATM and I'm going to go away. I think that's a cardinal sin. I understand people are eager to get that second gift, but we're so eager and so if our retention rate is 27 percent, getting that second gift is only working for 20 percent of the folks, I'd rather wait on that second gift and please the 70 percent of folks who do want to be treated properly.

**Beth:** First I'd like to say that I'm thrilled that I've done one thing right in parenting. I made my children write thank you notes with detail and adjectives just like your mother did and hopefully that will help them grow up to be gracious people.

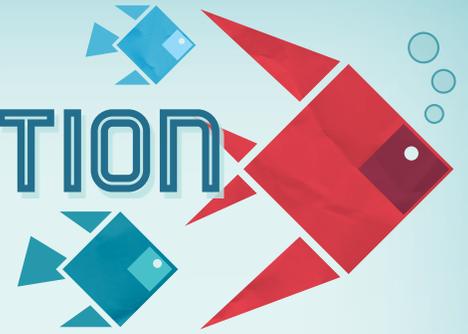
**Lynne:** It will.

**Beth:** This is a really tough thing because I know I've heard all the time, this is definitely something that is recommended in lots of fundraising circles. You know what? You ask them, you put a thank you note out, you stick a note in there. It's a bit of a controversial topic to say "this isn't doing it." It's interesting that you're saying that if the statistics in the world are saying there's only 27 percent retention, if this is what people are doing, it's kind of clear that it's not working. I'm sure there's going to be some people saying "well it's working for us."

**Lynne:** Great. Let me see your first-time donor retention rate. Let me talk to your donor base. According to the Bank of America survey that comes out every two years, the number one reason why donors stop giving is they're over-solicited. I always say to people "What is your ask to thank ratio." Again I was with the same client. They're wonderful people. They work at a children's hospital. They're wonderful people. I give \$25. I made my gift. I get my receipt and in that is a BRE, a business reply envelope. Well that's an ask so that's one ask to one thank you. Then I get a handwritten note and in it it includes a link to the giving site. OK, it should lead to an impact site that shows the impact of my giving, not lead me to another gift. Then I get a newsletter from you and in the newsletter is a big box that says "Donate now."

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There's another ask. We literally counted and went through the donor experience and their ask to thank ratio was 8:1, and that's not uncommon. I've seen them as high as 16:1, and I understand that somewhere along the lines of fundraising history and tradition someone said "The right thing to do is get that second gift." Well, how come our retention rates are in the toilet? It's because we're not valuing our donors and not saying that you matter to us as more than just a source for funding. It's a one way relationship and no one wants to be in a one way relationship and so someone needs to bring me statistical evidence. I have yet to see it that says that that second gift right away also equals better retention because if it means that I lose the 20 percent of people that I'm holding on to, but gain the 75 percent of people that I'm losing, I'll take 75 percent over 25 percent all day long. If we want to get down to fundraising numbers, I'll do it all day long. It's just like direct mail. They're like "The longer the letter the more the donation." OK, but that's for the less than 2 percent of people who actually read that letter. Let's talk to the 98 percent who didn't read the letter and didn't reply and ask them what they would like.

**Beth:** That a really interesting distinction because I heard those same things, all kinds of statistics that say the 11x17 folded in half, four-page letter statistically is the highest. It's interesting to hear other perspectives on that.

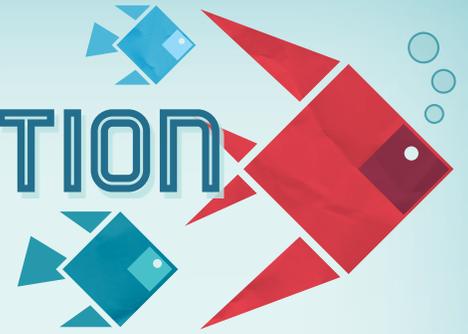
**Lynne:** Is it?

**Beth:** Yeah!

**Lynne:** Is it in 2015? Because I've been in this industry for 15 years, and my gut would say "Yes, back when Mal Warwick wrote the book on how to write direct appeals and back then in 1984 or 1990 maybe, but it's 2015 and our attention spans are about the size of a phone screen." I always ask people "When's the last time you read an eight-page letter? When is the last time you read a two-page letter? I'm just curious," and people go "Well," and I'm like "No. When is the last time you read one?" If you can tell me within the last week that you actually sat down and read cover to cover a two- or four-page letter, you're an anomaly. The vast majority of us are busy working Americans, busy working professionals, and I don't have the time to sit and read a two-page letter. Unless it has law firm at the top, I'm not reading

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it. You've got two screens of my cell phone. If you write me an email that's more than three scrolls, I'll just pick up the phone and call you because I don't have time for that. Are we programming to the minority or the majority? The retention numbers would say to us that it doesn't matter that we're getting a second gift in the door from the minority of people if we're not holding to the money that we need. It doesn't matter.

**Beth:** Interesting. A term that you mentioned when you were talking, you talked about linking to an impact site. I think I know what you mean by that, but I would love to have you describe that term and if you could give an example of how somebody's using something like that to create a better relationship with their donors.

**Lynne:** Yeah, I always say you've got to thank and you've got to tell me the impact of my gift so there should be a place on your website where I don't just go to find out how I can give more money, but I need to know what my money did. I really need to know what my money did and so there should be a place that shows the impact of philanthropic dollars on your organization and it should totally be there as easy to read as your giving site is. We really need to focus on that our donors more now than ever are saying "Yes, but you have to show me the impact of my gifts."

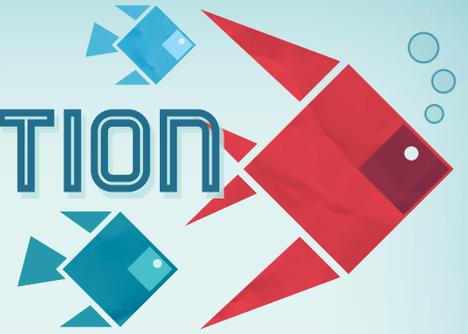
**Beth:** I think that's really interesting especially when I think about things like website design. When you talk about a website development, I'm thinking as you're talking in my head about the different navigation tabs that are on a lot of websites especially for smaller organizations. It's about us and our programs and donate to us. As I'm thinking as I'm going across it, every single one of those things is usually about the organization and what really makes a difference is getting out of the way and be willing to be the facilitator of somebody else's experience. The idea of maybe creating a whole section or a tab or a prominent area for both your donors and for other people who want to know not just what you do, but what you have done. It's funny. I hadn't really thought about it that way. I think that's really important.

**Lynne:** It's just as important as the time and money you spend in invest in telling people why they have to give.

**Beth:** Is there a site that you could think of, maybe that you could send me a link to later that

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I could put up into the show notes to give people a demonstration of here's somebody who is doing it really well.

**Lynne:** charity: water. They're the best in the business.

**Beth:** Yes, they really are.

**Lynne:** charity: water. You know who does it well also? My friend Blake owns a shoe company called "Tom's Shoes" and they have a giving report that shows the impact of the shoes that they give away at Tom's, and they have a great impact report. I have tons of samples on my website as well. Impact reports and donor relations websites, so happy to do that as well.

**Beth:** That's terrific and I will absolutely make sure that people get a link to your website to get to it because seeing examples, it's sometimes so hard to imagine what would I put on there. What kinds of things do people put onto an impact site?

**Lynne:** On an impact site, you would put everything. This is what's interesting. So many people are publishing annual reports, and I suggest that they don't do that and that they instead publish an impact report because an annual report promotes the organization and in impact report promotes the donor because we really want to make the donor our hero. If you look at a good impact site, it will have donor stories. It will have success stories that have happened and will usually have a good infographic. We want to tell stories. That's our number one cause to our donors is storytelling, but also there are numbers-people so we have to appease them. One of the easiest ways to show impact through numbers right now is through infographics. It will also have the ways in which we recognize our donors so it could be everything from your giving societies all the way to that you nominated a philanthropist for an award at your local AFP philanthropy day. It could be a lot of things, but when I built mine at Yeshiva University, it was our students showing gratitude. It was really what I call an attitude of gratitude page that incorporated the impact that your giving has on these lives. It's everything from this is what kind of communications you receive from us to this is what your gift actually did this year and here's what we're grateful for.

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*with Beth Brodovsky*



**Beth:** I think those are all such great ideas, especially for ways for people to show it visually. It's so important to be capturing more than just your donors dressed up and holding a glass of champagne staring at you from a banquet table.

**Lynne:** This is so not that. The other thing here is I'm not asking for people to create brand new content. Take the content you have and re-purpose it. Come up with your thank you pieces. One of the quickest things we did at Yeshiva is we took all of our thank you and impact pieces that we mailed out, we put them on a digital platform and linked them to that website because they're going to throw away the pieces. Let's be honest. That's the sad part of the reality of the work that we do is that not everybody hangs on to everything.

**Beth:** I know, and as a designer myself, I spend a lot of time creating a lot of beautiful things that don't hang around very long. They really don't.

**Lynne:** That's the reality and we have to as much as we hem and haw over a word for 20 minutes, we have to understand that's the reality of our audience and we have to have a little grace and let that go even though we've argued for twenty minutes over the word gratitude versus generosity versus philanthropy. To them, like I said, you only have a finite amount of time in their mind's eye. How do we get in front of that mind's eye? Digital is another way and I understand that when people are investigating looking into nonprofit, the website is the number one way they get their information.

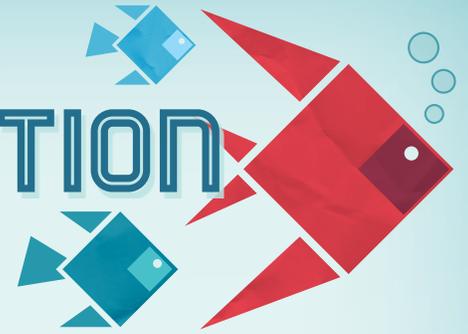
**Beth:** Most of the time action beats perfection.

**Lynne:** Yes, and I also say to people is "If the only thing you have on your website is help us, help us, help us, instead of you're great, you're great, you're great, then it's all about you and not about me and as a donor, it's got to be about me." It's got to be about me.

**Beth:** I feel that I really want nonprofits to start to recognize that they have something to offer, that it's so easy to get into the mindset that people need to give to you and it's so easy to forget that in executing this work, you have something that you can give to the people that care about the work that you do. You have stories, you have information, you have photographs. You have on site, you have boots on the ground sometimes as they say, that

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you can pull pieces of your experience and executing this work out and bring it to the people that care about the fact that the work gets done in a way that no one else can do and that's a gift that you can give everyone that's interested in the cause that you care about. It's your responsibility as an organization to say "We can do that," and to think of it as less than a one sided equation. I think it's easy as a nonprofit to get focused on we need people to give it to us and it gets you kind of caught up in your head about I have this scarcity mentality that if I'm not asking all the time, I'm not going to get enough and if you can flip your action and just what you're focusing on to we're doing so much let's share it, it's amazing what comes. I heard somebody say recently on another podcast that I listen to "Ask for money and you get advice. Ask for advice and you get money."

**Lynne:** I say that all the time.

**Beth:** If you share what you're doing and involve people in your story, it's shocking, but it's so counter-intuitive and so hard. I'm a control freak too. Take your foot off the pedal to relax a little bit and to trust that by giving yourselves that people want to know and you've got some value to share, that eventually they will be willing to pay for it in the form of contributions.

**Lynne:** Absolutely, but there has to be an added proposition for me as the donor and if you're just going to tell me how great you are, there's no value in that for me.

**Beth:** No. It's got to be the work. People don't want to fund your existence. They want to fund your impact.

**Lynne:** Right. I wrote an entire blog about that yesterday talking about words matter because I received an email and it said "Thank you for giving to our year-end appeal." Number one, I didn't give to their year-end appeal and number two, really? That's what you're thanking me for? Giving to your year-end appeal. I was talking to some of my fundraiser friends on Facebook about the way we talk to our donors is so asinine. That's probably not politically correct to say, but I also received a letter in the mail and it said "Your annual fund enclosed." OK, that doesn't motivate me.

**Beth:** What does that even mean?

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**Lynne:** I don't know what that means. I mean I know what it means because I work in fundraising, but donors don't know what that means and don't know how that applies to them. My friend wrote the following. He said "Reminds me of the story of the disappointed president when he found out that an alumnus had given \$40 million to a research institute instead of the \$20 million gift he had solicited from the same donor for his alma mater. The donor said "You asked me to help finish your campaign. They asked me to help cure cancer and save lives."

**Beth:** That is really enlightening, I think.

**Lynne:** If you ask me to give to your annual fund, I'm like "That's not sexy. That does not blow my skirt up."

**Beth:** I don't want to fund your annual fund.

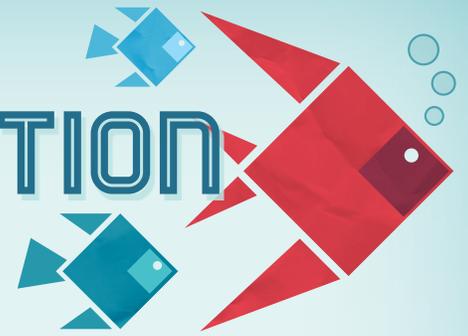
**Lynne:** Exactly, and if I wasn't in fundraising, I would know what that meant anyway, but if you ask me to give so that students can go to college, I'm going to give. If you ask me to support a student like Mary who has had a rough life and who has an opportunity to be educated, I'm going to give, but if you say to me that our annual fund is important, I'm going to be like "So is my sock drawer, but you don't see me asking people for money for it."

**Beth:** Lynne, what would you suggest as a resource for people if they really wanted to start thinking about balancing out their ratio of asking to thanking and recommitting, really committing to delivering the story of impact, do you have a resource that would be helpful for people to start learning more about this?

**Lynne:** I think there's a ton of digital resources, but I go back to a classic of Penelope Burk's Donor-Centered Fundraising. A lot of people say to me "It's expensive to invest in donor relations and donor retention," and I say "Yes, but it's expensive not to," and her book provides some statistics as to why these thank you touches are important and what kind of bottom line impact. Also Adrian Sargeant's Donor Retention is absolutely phenomenal because he actually monetarily quantifies what it means to lose a certain percentage of donors every year, and that tends to speak to your board and your CEO and your numbers

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people because a lot of us in fundraising get this concept. We're not able to put it into practice. The other recommendation that I have and now that I've moved into consulting full time, I think this is especially important. I don't have a product to sell you, and if you're getting all your statistics and resources and data from someone who is also selling direct mail services or the #10 window envelope, you can't take advice from the person who is also pitching it to you. You have to look for neutral sources and there's tons of them out there. Between AFP and supporting advancement, you don't have to listen to just the things that that one source has provided you, that it's OK to question the norm. It's OK to say "I understand that you think we're going to put a BRE in every receipt, but I'm trying to hold onto my donors," and when they balk and kick and say "We're the experts in this," say "But I'm the expert in my donors and these donors the way they behave, I know them so I'm going to trust my gut and my knowledge to know that this is not a fundraising practice I want to employ." I think that's really important as well.

**Beth:** Absolutely. If someone was ready to jump in and get started, out of all the amazing things that you've talked about, is there one thing that you think if they just did this, they would be so far along and it would be really big and have a huge impact on them for their organization.

**Lynne:** Absolutely. If they just put a program together for their first-time donors. If they just took notice of the people who came out of nowhere seemingly and gave them money for the first time ever in their lives, they've got to do something for those people. It's got to be more than a receipt and a mechanical thank you letter. That's not going to work. You've got to say "This is how we're different. Your gift matters to us." You've got to stand out. Remember, as much as we don't like to say it, we're in a competitive charitable environment. Two percent of the ADP is what gets given so if I'm doing that better than someone else and someone else is asking that first-time donor for money, and I'm thanking them, who do you think they're going to give to again? It's going to be me.

**Beth:** Absolutely. Thank you so much. this was incredibly valuable. How can people get in touch with you if they want to learn a little bit more?

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**Lynne:** Oh sure. I have a website. It's [www.donorrelationsguru.com](http://www.donorrelationsguru.com) and it's really simple. I have monthly webinars. More than anything and what I want you to realize is that I have thousands upon thousands of samples of what other organizations have done, and that's really something that I'm not in it to get you to buy anything. I'm there to share. I love my profession, my vocation. Whether you have resources or don't have resources, there's something on the website for you and it's really about flipping your attitude to gratitude. There's everything from acknowledgment letters to solicitation pieces to impact and stewardship reports. Take advantage of it. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. I'm a big fan of copy and steal everything, and so start somewhere, but start now. It has to start now.

**Beth:** Lynne, this was fabulous. Thank you so much for sharing your expertise with both me and with the nonprofit community.

**Lynne:** Happy to do it. Thank you again, Beth.