



Jessica Birken, MNM, Esq.
Birken Law Office PLLC
1400 Van Buren St. NE
Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55413
www.birkenlaw.com
Office: 612.200.3679

Magic Wands and Shiny New Toys - Transcript

[Speaker 1]

Welcome to Charity Therapy, a podcast from Birken Law about building better nonprofits. I'm your host, Jess Birken. Hello and welcome to this episode of Charity Therapy.

Today I am joined by my new friend, Patrick Kirby, the nonprofit and fundraising consultant behind Do Good Better. He is a self-described human exclamation mark. Yeah, I get that vibe from you.

That fits. If you've listened to Patrick's podcast, the Do Good Better podcast, then you know this is true. Thank you so much for being here, Patrick.

[Speaker 2]

This is a blast, not only to make a super cool new internet friend and soon to be a real-life friend.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, hell yeah.

[Speaker 2]

But very cool to be on your podcast. I think a lot of nonprofits don't have the guts to say and ask the things that need to get answered in order for them to cross these big hills. Thanks for having me on.

[Speaker 1]

I love that. Okay, we're totally going to make a little snippet of that and use that as a testimonial on the podcast page because you just sold it. Perfect.

This is why you're good at fundraising. Yeah. Seriously, though, like why I wanted to have you on the podcast is because you do bring this really good joie de vivre and this energy to your work.

I feel like lots of people find fundraising really difficult, really intimidating, really overwhelming and really full of jargon. I love how you simplify things, right? Do good better.

It's keeping it simple. One thing that I know that you and I have in common as things we like to rant about is when nonprofits say, but this is the way we've always done it. So as our little nugget of wisdom here today, I got to hear your take on why is, but this is the way we've always done it.

Why is that statement so dangerous?

[Speaker 2]

It is the statement that is always made before the big, hairy, audacious goal is shot down and the way that you move forward as a nonprofit and the way that you enjoy doing this work is to always push forward. You know, so if you're sitting in a board meeting and you talk about your

mission statement a lot, right? I always like to talk about a vision statement and a vision statement is way more different than a mission statement.

The vision statement is what you want to be when you grow up and you cannot grow up as an organization. If you refrain from acknowledging that doing it the way you've always done it is the wrong way. And I'm not saying to blow up your organization.

I'm just saying, please let the old ways go by the old way so that you can innovate and have fun and bring enthusiasm and life to a mission that you just really love. And those that just don't want to do the extra work and heavy lifting and the exciting stuff that happens when you do, it's the absolute worst.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, we were talking before we started recording about the parallels between legal and nonprofit and fear of taking risks is one of those things. All right. Are you ready to answer some questions?

[Speaker 2]

Let's do it. I'm very excited.

[Speaker 1]

All right. I work for a small cultural organization in my area. We are starting to get a lot of press attention after a news piece came out on our program and our email list is growing quickly.

So far, my typical marketing activity hasn't really translated to more donations. The Excel donor database and our single MailChimp list just isn't cutting it anymore. I want to build more

sophisticated systems to store donor information, build segments and craft messaging to them, but I don't know where to start.

Help.

[Speaker 2]

Well, first of all, congratulations. Number one, I think you need to pat yourself on the back a little bit for like, whoa, we got a good mailing list. Number two, I would concentrate on the content and your impact as far as stories and the things you're sending out rather than being overly concerned about the amount of donations you get in yet.

You want to have a lot of buy into like, I feel really good about supporting this organization, et cetera. But you want to be very clear with your calls to action. So don't ask for money all the time.

Give them something to be entertained with. Give them something to be educated by and then make an ask. Give them an opportunity to give at any point in time but be very purposeful with the amount of times that you make a specific ask for and then really concentrate on building a relationship with the new people who have in your system.

So your calls to action might be, hey, download this free checklist and get them to sign up and click on that and get them used to clicking on things, provide them some educational materials and then go, hey, we're going to be fundraising for a specific program and a service that's going to help. I know you want in. We're looking for gifts and supporters.

[Click here](#). That's how I would do it. And then your sophistication question goes along with get a CRM system that's specific for nonprofits.

You can go from anywhere from very inexpensive like little green light or donor doc or really good resources up to the more mid-tier ones like neon one. And then really, if you have the audacity to have something like Blackboard and you just really don't want to sleep at night and you want to have that as a thing, it's the worst, but you can have it, I guess. But get yourself a CRM system.

It's going to automate a lot of stuff for you, and you don't have to worry about it. You can actually segment kindly. There's a lot of entry level versions of it.

And if you need any advice, let us know and we'll lead you to one.

[Speaker 1]

One thing I would just caution, I think there can be a tendency to sort of feel like a shiny new toy is the solution to all my problems. And so, I would just be urging you to realize that no CRM is going to be a magical fundraising magic wand that fixes all of the hard things. It's not going to like to write the content for you and make it click worthy.

All of those things are just there's no way around putting in the work. So, I just also want to put in a plug for like software isn't always the solution. I mean, it sounds like they do need something.

You got to get out of the Excel sheet with the free MailChimp account. I'm there with my kid's robotics team, but eventually you got to get out of there. But just remember what Patrick is saying involves you actually like growing and doing the work and falling on your face and making a mistake a few times and seeing what works and A, B testing.

And there's no amount of CRM software that's going to avoid that.

[Speaker 2]

So, and then again, you have those really good stories and make sure you tell that story as often as possible. And again, embrace the growth and have fun with it and ask people who are on your list what they would like to see. And again, this is a long game.

This is not a silver bullet for anything. But know that your relationship development in storytelling has a long-term effect. Keep them hanging on.

[Speaker 1]

Right on. So, speaking of asking people what they want, our second question kind of ties into that. I am on the development team in my new job.

Congratulations. And I'm having a hard time connecting with our donors. In my previous organization, I found the donors to be really engaged and excited to talk to me.

But that's not been the case here. They never respond to any emails or voice messages and barely want to talk on the phone for more than two minutes. I'm not even asking them for donations.

It's just the thank you call asking for their feedback and inviting them to come to our events. I feel like all these unsuccessful calls are wearing down my motivation. What do I do?

[Speaker 2]

Boy, that's a really good question. I would say here's a little bit of this is going to it might it's going to sound like it hurts. Nobody cares about you or your organization as much as you do.

They are busy. They have other things going on. And I know all you want to do is talk about how amazing things are.

And that's not necessarily the case with everybody. Your actual outreach itself, your messages that you leave, the small little notes are the first line of offense as relationship building goes, not your last. So don't think of it as these two minute conversations.

You get a donor on for two and a half minutes and you get to tell them who you are and thank you and whatever. And they hang up. Great.

But again, pat yourself on the back. Do not give yourself a bad grade on that. That's amazing.

And in fact, leaving a message telling them thank you and who you are is just as effective in their brain as a touch point that you would pick up the phone. So that's OK, too. I would say if you're going to invite them to an event, that's wonderful.

I like this as a way to encourage some conversation is I'd love your perspective on this event or this mission or whatever. Or I'd love to know why you got involved. I'm learning and I'd love a little bit of help.

Right. It's almost being this invitation to helping you understand how this organization has been since you're brand new. And they almost seem to be as a mentor as a way.

That's a good angle to kind of take. But remember, you're doing great just doing the outreach itself. And that's the first of many touch points that you can have.

And again, I think we even talked about this. Jesse even mentioned this in the last answer, which is like these are A-B tests. Some people might not like to be on the phone.

Some people might not like email. Some people like text messages. You can actually ask them, hey, how would you like to be communicated with?

And all of a sudden, you know about those donors better than they've ever been known before by any of your predecessors. And you become the rock star that they've always wanted to chat with in the way they like to be chatted with.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, it almost, you know, not being in the fundraising world myself, it almost sounds like this new job needs you more than the old job did, right? Like the old job had like really cool, established relationships for you to like to get a bunch of juicy like ego boosts from. And here you're doing all the work and you've got to make it about them and really be investing in that relationship with them.

And that, you know, that is hard, especially if that's not what you were expecting at the new job. But that is where you are. And I mean, what it sounds like listening to you talk about it, Patrick, is they have so much room to build on and to like to make cool things possible if they just have a little bit of patience with it.

So, you know, keep your eye on the prize of the board giving you the gold star later.

[Speaker 2]

A really good list to start with, if you ever get in a rut, are the individuals who have donated to your organization the longest or the ones who always pick up, right? So, develop a list of people

who always pick up. You call them to pick you up as you go through some of these calls just to get reminded that you're doing OK, that you're doing you're a rock star.

They love you. They love the mission you get to talk to about a little bit. It'll motivate you.

It'll energize you enough to go through those cold call lists or those not so warm lists. You'll get through it.

[Speaker 1]

That is definitely embedded in this question, is that their bucket is getting emptied. But remember that, you know, like Patrick said, you don't know. You could be totally filling up their buckets.

They could have listened to that voicemail and been like, oh, that's so nice. You just didn't get the feedback loop that you were looking for. So just pretend that everyone loves your voice message.

All right, so here's our third question. This is a good one. All right.

Amazon Smile is ending in early 2023, and I'm so bummed. We never got to a point where we made a significant amount from it, but it was a call to action on pretty much all of our donor communications. Now we are looking down the barrel of this loss, and my organization is wondering, what do we do now?

There's just nothing else out there like it. OK, this question cracks me up.

[Speaker 2]

First of all, good. I'm glad it's gone. That's the.

This company who makes I don't want to even guess what, four hundred billion dollars.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, zillions.

[Speaker 2]

Are going to give you point zero zero zero zero two percent on someone buying toilet paper and you get a check for 13 cents, and you're supposed to be grateful for the opportunity that someone can give you. No good riddance off of your things. Now, first of all, all of a sudden now you get to instead of giving somebody else the kudos that they get to go buy some stuff, is your call to action becomes give directly to us in the programs.

You don't need anybody. You don't need some guy on a yacht.

[Speaker 1]

You don't need that Bezos money, that two pennies that just drove purchases, which didn't work on mobile and required you to open up a special tab in your browser in order to do it and created so much friction. Oh, my gosh, I'm going to start ranting now. But can we talk about the elephant in the room here?

You just said you don't get anything from it. It's not a loss. What is lost is all the time and effort you put into putting it on every single donor communication.

And now you have to redo all that work. And I am sorry. I have been there.

I understand that it's a pain in the butt. But you didn't lose anything other than your time.

[Speaker 2]

In fact, now you gain an opportunity to actually direct everybody who is on your list to what you do. Download this thing from our website. Go click on our Facebook page.

Go buy our sweatshirt. Go buy our things. Go donate here to our stuff.

Here's another story or a video. You have so many calls to action that doesn't involve you going to a third-party site to pay you fractions of a penny on the hundreds of dollars. This is a really golden opportunity.

You get to really think back like, what do you want your donors to do? Did you really want your donors to go remember that they had a water filter that went out on their refrigerator a month ago? No.

You want them to remember that they have to buy tickets to your gala, or you want them to be reminded that their dollars impacted the community in which you live. That's what you want to remind them of. And I think this is a really good opportunity to nod and go, you know what?

Yeah, Jess and Patrick were right. This is stupid and silly. And we're going to go and kick a lot of butts by actually getting your call to action to be about you and those that you serve.

And the community in which you're making better.

[Speaker 1]

I want you to start keeping track of the dollars that you raise. You're going to pick something else, right? You're going to be like, we're going to sell this branded cap or we're going to do, you know, the cute dog leashes with our rescue logo, whatever it is, you're going to do something to replace this.

And you need to keep track of those dollars. And then I want you to write back to the podcast in six months or nine months or a year or whatever it is. And I want to know the percent increase you have experienced.

[Speaker 2]

And I'm going to make a prediction. If that letter comes in, it's going to read something like this. Dear Jess, I sold one T-shirt and made more money on that than Amazon Smile ever.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. All right. I made a little list of like good takeaways.

First of all, in your fundraising, focus on creating great content. Tell the story. Tell your story.

Tell your amazing stories as well as you can. Secondly, software is not the savior for your fundraising. Just remember, new software is fun and exciting, but it won't solve all your problems.

Also, a big theme in here was make it about the donor. Ask them, what do they want? What do they like?

What's their perspective? How can we help you be donor focused and not in that like vaguely dominant culture racist way that we're always talking about in the industry? But like just in an empathetic way.

And then, you know, I think a good one here is you don't have to have it all figured out. It's OK to change things midstream. It's OK if Amazon Smile goes away.

It's OK if that thing you tried didn't work. You can try something else and look at how you did. And I bet you're going to have done better because you will have learned so much along the way.

[Speaker 2]

For those of you listening and you're working in the nonprofit world, you're doing amazing things. I think we forget to remind ourselves that we work in an industry that is making our world better and that you're doing way more work and you're making way more impact than you think you are. So take some time and just realize that you're doing amazing things and that you're part of the solution to every social ill and social woe the government shouldn't and can't figure out themselves.

And like you're doing great stuff. So don't burden yourself with the like, I'm not doing enough. Yeah, you are.

You're doing great stuff. You're doing great things. So, you know, keep that up and just remind yourself that a couple of times.

Fine.

[Speaker 1]

I love that. It's so easy to get lost in the weeds. You know, you are also amazing and doing great things, Patrick, and I'm so glad you could be here.

I know people are going to want to connect to you, find you online. Where can they do that?

[Speaker 2]

Easiest way to find me is at [DoGoodBetterConsulting.com](https://www.dogoodbetterconsulting.com) and that has a lot of links to not only our podcast, but we've got an online university and we've got webinars and we've got YouTube pages full of goodies that we have all the time. I love answering questions. So just finding an email right there and just going, I got a question for you.

I love answering those.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. So, find everything there. And apparently there's going to be a conference in September and Patrick's going to be there because it's his conference and I'm going to speak and it's going to be amazing.

[Speaker 2]

It might be too much and I'm there for it.

[Speaker 1]

If you enjoyed this episode, do me a huge favor. Share it with a friend. Rate, review, subscribe.

Do you know someone who's crushed by Amazon Smile going away? Let them know. This episode exists.

They need to hear about how it's not a loss. If you have a question or a story to share, I would love to hear from you. If it's about fundraising, I'll have Patrick back on.

Send me a note online. Send me a voice memo. Call 612-208-9120 or hit me up at charitytherapy.show. Thanks for listening. All right, folks, that's our show. Be sure to follow me on Instagram or Twitter at Jess Birken. We want to hear from you.

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About the Author



Hi, I'm Jess Birken.

I'm the owner of Birken Law Office, I help nonprofits solve problems so they can quit worrying and get back to what matters most – The Mission. I'm not like most attorneys, I actually have an outgoing personality, and – like you – I like to think outside the box. Most of my clients are passionate and have an entrepreneurial spirit. I'm like that too. My goal is to help you crush it. Getting bogged down in the minutia sucks the joy out of the important stuff. My clients want to do the work – not the paperwork.

Let's connect!

jess@Birken Law.com | [612.200.3679](tel:612.200.3679) | [@JessBirken](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jessbirken)
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www.facebook.com/Birken Law