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Ditching the Fundraising Myths with Patrick Kirby – Transcript

Jess Birken 00:00:02 Welcome to Charity therapy, the podcast where we explore the ups and downs of the nonprofit sector and answer your burning questions. I'm your host, Jess Birkin, owner of Birkin Law Office, and I'm excited you're here. Imagine hanging out with me and my super smart, funny, nonprofit expert pals. You get to ask them anything about your nitty gritty nonprofit life and get their wisdom for free. Whether you're a seasoned pro or just strapping on your nonprofit boots, we're here to share stories and remind you you're not alone on this journey. So get ready to join the conversation and bring me the tough questions I ain't scared. Ready to rock? Let's dive in.

Meghan 00:00:41 Hey everyone, welcome to this episode of Charity therapy. This is Megan, one of your hosts, and I'm popping back in to say we're bringing an awesome episode back into your feeds today, featuring the one and only Patrick Kirby from Do Good Better. This is a favorite episode of mine, because Jess and Patrick just have this super contagious energy that you can't help but take on when you're listening.

Meghan 00:01:05 So let's go ahead and get started.

Jess Birken 00:01:07 Hello and welcome to this episode of Charity therapy. Today I am joined by my new friend Patrick Kerby, the non-profit 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.

Patrick Kirby 00:01:37 It's just a blast not only to make a super cool new internet friend and soon to be in like, real life friend. Oh hell yeah, yeah, but very cool to be on your podcast. I love the idea of therapy sessions, even though they're anonymous and that's totally fine. But I like this. I think a lot of non-profits 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. So this is a wonderful platform, so thanks for having me on.

Jess Birken 00:02:04 I love that. Okay, we're totally gonna make a little snippet of that and use that as a testimonial on the podcast page, because that you just sold it.

Jess Birken 00:02:12 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, like, really good joie de vivre and this energy to your work. And I feel like lots of people find fundraising really difficult, really intimidating, really overwhelming, and really full of jargon. And I love how you kind of simplify things, right? Like do good better. We were just talking about brevity and I think there there it is. You know, that's it's keeping it simple. And 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.

Patrick Kirby 00:02:56 Yeah.

Jess Birken 00:02:58 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?

Patrick Kirby 00:03:10 It is the statement that is always made before the big hairy, audacious goal is shot down.

Patrick Kirby 00:03:18 And I think 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. It's way more different than a sort of a mission statement. A 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. Yeah. Let the old ways go by the old way so that you can innovate and have fun and bring enthusiasm in 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, er, it's the absolute worst.

Jess Birken 00:04:16 Yeah, we were talking before we started recording about the parallels between legal and non profit and fear of taking risks is one of those things.

Jess Birken 00:04:26 Yep I love it. Leave it by yield. Wayside. Leave it at the road stop. Leave it at the picnic bench and pick up someone else's sandwich.

Patrick Kirby 00:04:36 And just run with it and just run.

Jess Birken 00:04:39 Oh. All right, well, that was great. And I couldn't agree more. Are you ready to answer some questions?

Patrick Kirby 00:04:44 Let's do it. I'm very excited.

Jess Birken 00:04:46 All right, here we go. First question. 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!

Patrick Kirby 00:05:21 Oh, that's a great. Well, first of all, congratulations. Number one. Right.

Patrick Kirby 00:05:25 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. Right. You want to have a lot of buy into, like, I feel really good about supporting this organization, etc., 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. Ways to be racially sensitive, or embrace your Bipoc friends at the workplace checklist, and get them to sign up and click on that and write to get them used to clicking on things.

Patrick Kirby 00:06:32 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 that's how I would do it. And then your your 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 the 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 and it's going to automate a lot of stuff for you, and you don't have to worry about it. And you can actually segment kindly. There's a lot of entry level versions of it, and if you need any, you know, advice, let us know and we'll lead you to one.

Jess Birken 00:07:29 One thing I would just caution this listener, I think there can be a tendency to sort of feel like a shiny new toy is the solution to all my problems. Yeah. 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 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. So with the free MailChimp account, I'm there with my kids robotics team. But yeah, 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.

Jess Birken 00:08:34 So hang in there.

Patrick Kirby 00:08:35 And then again, you have those really good stories. And make sure you tell that story as often as possible. And again embrace embrace the growth and have fun with it. And ask people who are on your list what they would like to see what they're interested, right? So ask for their perspective and really engage them in different ways. And again. Email is one way, but a text message and a phone call, an event and an online. Like there's a lot of different ways. Don't get reliant on one avenue. That's not the way to go either. So. And again, this is a long game. Don't think that this is like again, 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.

Jess Birken 00:09:16 Yeah right on. Love that. So speaking of asking people what they want, our second question kind of ties into that. So I feel like you're a plant in the audience or something like, you just did that for me to help us transition.

Jess Birken 00:09:29 Obviously you're just that good.

Patrick Kirby 00:09:31 We're tracking so well together that this is what happened.

Jess Birken 00:09:35 We're like two exclamation points in a pod right now.

Patrick Kirby 00:09:38 Good vibes.

Jess Birken 00:09:40 All right, here we go. Let's deal with this second. Listeners question. 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 a 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?

Patrick Kirby 00:10:21 Boy, that's a really good question.

Patrick Kirby 00:10:23 I would say, well, here's a little bit of this is going to it might. It's going to sound like it hurts okay.

Patrick Kirby 00:10:29 But it's not. This is to make you feel really good about yourself.

Jess Birken 00:10:31 You don't hire the doctor not to cut you, though, Patrick. Right? We're they're here for advice and might be a little painful.

Patrick Kirby 00:10:38 All right.

Jess Birken 00:10:39 But it's going to be delivered with love.

Patrick Kirby 00:10:41 It's going to be a little a little prick. 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 is relationship building goes not your last. So don't think of it as these two minute conversations you get a donor on for 2.5 minutes, and you get to tell them who you are and thank you and whatever, and they hang up great. Again, Pat yourself on the back. Do not give yourself a bad grade on that.

Patrick Kirby 00:11:23 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 touchpoint that you would pick up the phone. So that's okay too. I would say if you're going to invite them to an event, That's 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 touchpoints that you can have. And again, I think we even talked about this, Jesse, I mentioned this in the last answer, which is like these are a B tests.

Patrick Kirby 00:12:22 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.

Jess Birken 00:12:42 Yet 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, get a bunch of juicy, like ego boost from. Yeah. 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.

Jess Birken 00:13:19 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, 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, you know, giving you the gold star later.

Patrick Kirby 00:13:43 It's listen as a high I on the. Yeah as a high I on the disc score I need constant validation. I'm doing okay anyway. So I understand that this you need this 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 okay, that you're doing you're a rock star. They love you. They love the mission. You get to talk to them about a little bit.

Patrick Kirby 00:14:15 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.

Jess Birken 00:14:23 Yeah, I love that you brought up being a high I because first of all, I am also a very high I. And what's two exclamation points turned upside down is two eyes. There you go. That's us. We did it. but that is definitely embedded in this question. Is that. They're not like 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

messages, right? As a high I that requires a lot of like, I gotta win people over, I get that. Yeah, absolutely. All right. Anything else on this?

Patrick Kirby 00:15:12 No, it was a that's that's a really good.

Patrick Kirby 00:15:14 And again that happens all the time especially when you're new that validation is really important. But to know that it's just it takes a little bit of time and you're you're chipping away and you're learning more about your donors than anyone else has. And you're going to put that documented information and do whatever you've got so that you can always refer to it. So you're you're good. You're good. Breathe. You're okay.

Jess Birken 00:15:35 It's all about that CRM. Get that info in there. All right. So here's our third question.

Meghan 00:15:44 Hey there. It's Megan popping in from the future again, just with a little context in this last part of the episode. This next question is about Amazon Smile, which was a program where Amazon donated a teeny tiny percentage of a customer's purchase to a nonprofit that they chose, and the program was shut down in early 2023. If you weren't around for this, like, you didn't miss much. But the advice that Patrick gives for this question isn't really about Amazon Smile. It's more about considering what you want to do when you have your donor's attention.

Meghan 00:16:18 And trust me, that part is timeless. So let's go back in time and get back to the question.

Jess Birken 00:16:24 Oh, 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. Okay. This question.

Patrick Kirby 00:16:50 Oh.

Jess Birken 00:16:50 Boy, cracks me up.

Patrick Kirby 00:16:51 This okay, first of all, good. I'm glad it's gone. That's the.

Jess Birken 00:16:55 I know.

Patrick Kirby 00:16:57 What a dumb this this organization. Hold on. Let me rant for a second. This.

Jess Birken 00:17:03 Yeah. Here we go.

Patrick Kirby 00:17:04 This company who makes. I don't want to even guess what \$400 billion in the gazillions. Okay. Are going to give you 0.00002% on someone buying toilet paper, and you get a check for \$0.13, and you're supposed to be grateful for the opportunity that someone can give you.

Patrick Kirby 00:17:24 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. 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 to go send.

Jess Birken 00:17:46 You need that Bezos money, that two pennies. 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.

Patrick Kirby 00:18:02 It's just this. This was one of the most ill conceived really, because again, what you just said is we don't really get any money from it, but it was something that we did.

Jess Birken 00:18:11 Thank you. Like, can we talk about the elephant in the room here? You just said you don't get anything from it.

Patrick Kirby 00:18:17 Get that money.

Jess Birken 00:18:18 It's not a loss.

Jess Birken 00:18:19 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.

Patrick Kirby 00:18:34 No. In fact, you.

Jess Birken 00:18:35 Gave then your time.

Patrick Kirby 00:18:36 Yes. 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 to have no real benefit whatsoever. And you are going to realize this about many a month later to go, oh God, I didn't really need any of those things. This is a really golden opportunity. In fact, it gives you the, 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.

Patrick Kirby 00:19:30 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 Birken 00:19:47 Yeah. Jesse Patrick, we're right. This is stupid.

Patrick Kirby 00:19:50 And silly, and we're gonna go and kick a lot of butt 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.

Jess Birken 00:19:59 Seriously, I would I would really encourage, if you're out there and you're listening to this. Yep. 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.

Jess Birken 00:20:24 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 that you have experienced from wasting all of your efforts on this Amazon smile. There's just nothing out there like it. Yeah. Because it's it's trash. It was trash. And they tricked everybody into promoting Amazon. And I'm sorry, but you're going to do so much better. And I want to I want to know I want them to like, write back and tell us the year over year increase from that little piece of real estate or that ask or whatever it was they were doing when they just started directly asking for support.

Patrick Kirby 00:21:05 Yep. And I'm going to make a prediction. We can go back to this is that 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 love anonymous person who was questioned was answered. It will be one.

Jess Birken 00:21:23 Oh my God, we have to do this.

Jess Birken 00:21:25 I please.

Jess Birken 00:21:26 You have to write us back because I have to have Patrick back and we can play back the clip and I'll be like a fancy NPR podcast where it's like the time warp. And what was the letter actually like? You don't deny me this joy, people.

Patrick Kirby 00:21:42 I want that so bad for both of us.

Jess Birken 00:21:45 Right? It's a win win win, right?

Patrick Kirby 00:21:48 You raise more money, we get the podcast clip that lives on the internet in perpetuity. This is this is a winner.

Jess Birken 00:21:56 Really all about Jess and Patrick finding future times to hang out is where it all boils down to.

Patrick Kirby 00:22:02 It really does. Yep.

Jess Birken 00:22:03 All right. I made a little list of like good takeaways for the nuggets here. I'm gonna go over them. And if you think I missed something chime in. All right here here we go. First of all focus in your fundraising. Focus on creating great content. Tell the story. Tell your story. Tell your amazing stories as well as you can.

Jess Birken 00:22:21 Secondly, software is not the savior for your fundraising. Just remember that new software is fun and exciting, but it won't solve all your problems. Also, I heard 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 write? Be donor focused in that, 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 okay to change change things midstream. It's okay if Amazon Smile goes away. It's okay 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. What else? I think anything.

Patrick Kirby 00:23:13 Else? I think you nailed it. Here's the one thing that I like saying at any podcast or speaking gig or anything that I that I try to do.

Patrick Kirby 00:23:20 For those of you listening and you're working in the nonprofit, 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 don't burden yourself what they like. I'm not doing enough.

Jess Birken 00:23:54 Yeah you are. You're doing great stuff.

Patrick Kirby 00:23:55 You're doing great things. So, you know, keep that up and just remind yourself that a couple of times. Fine.

Jess Birken 00:24:00 I love that. It's so easy to get lost in the in the weeds, you know. Yeah. 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.

Jess Birken 00:24:13 Where can they do that?

Patrick Kirby 00:24:14 Sure. Easiest way to find me is that do good better consulting. Com 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, I love answering questions, so just finding an email right there and just going, I got a question for you. I love answering though I love it. Yeah. So find everything there.

Jess Birken 00:24:38 Awesome! If you enjoyed this episode, do me a huge favor. Share it with a friend. Rate review. Subscribe. 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 at [Charity therapy](#). Well, and as always, thanks for listening.

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.

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