



*Rachel*  
**MUIR**

## STORYTELLING FOR BETTER FUNDRAISING

Qgiv September 10, 2020

# Rachel Muir, CFRE

- Founder: Girlstart
- Featured on: Oprah,
- CNN, the Today Show
- What Rachel does:  
custom training, board  
retreats, online classes

Weaknesses: chips, queso



@rachelmuir

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www.rachelmuir.com





## What Rachel does:

Custom training

Board retreats

Keynotes

Webinars


Workshops

Speaking

*All on fundraising &  
virtual!*



Today's slides: [www.rachelmuir.com/handouts](http://www.rachelmuir.com/handouts)


A close-up, top-down view of a person's hand typing on a black laptop keyboard. The hand is positioned over the keyboard, with fingers pressing keys. The background is a wooden desk. In the top left corner, there is a black mug with a white rim and a green book. The overall image has a dark, muted color palette with a blue overlay.

**Speaker, trainer and nationally  
recognized non profit founder and  
thought leader.**

GET TO KNOW RACHEL

Get today's slides: [www.rachelmuir.com/handouts](http://www.rachelmuir.com/handouts)

# Want coaching from Rachel?



**Getting  
Boards to  
Fundraise**

**August**



**End of Year  
Fundraising  
Made Easy**

**September**



**Giving Tuesday  
+Year End  
Gifts**

**October**

[LeagueofExtraordinaryFundraisers.com](https://LeagueofExtraordinaryFundraisers.com)



Virtual stewardship:  
[www.rachelmuir.com/virtual](http://www.rachelmuir.com/virtual)

## How to Steward & Cultivate Donors in a Virtual World



*Rachel*  
**MUIR**

Top secrets  
of truly great  
storytelling

End of year  
storytelling  
tips

Makeovers &  
How to build  
a storytelling  
pipeline

3  
ingredients  
to any  
story

Bonus:  
5 story  
starters  
Q & A

# Storytelling for Better Fundraising



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A top-down view of a wooden desk. On the left, a portion of a silver laptop is visible, showing the keyboard with keys like 'delete', 'enter', 'shift', and 'alt'. Scattered across the desk are several crumpled pieces of paper: two white, two orange, and one blue. To the right of the laptop is a brown notebook with a black cover. A black pen lies diagonally across the notebook. The background is a solid yellow bar at the top of the image.

“I find that most people  
know what a story is until  
they sit down to write one.”

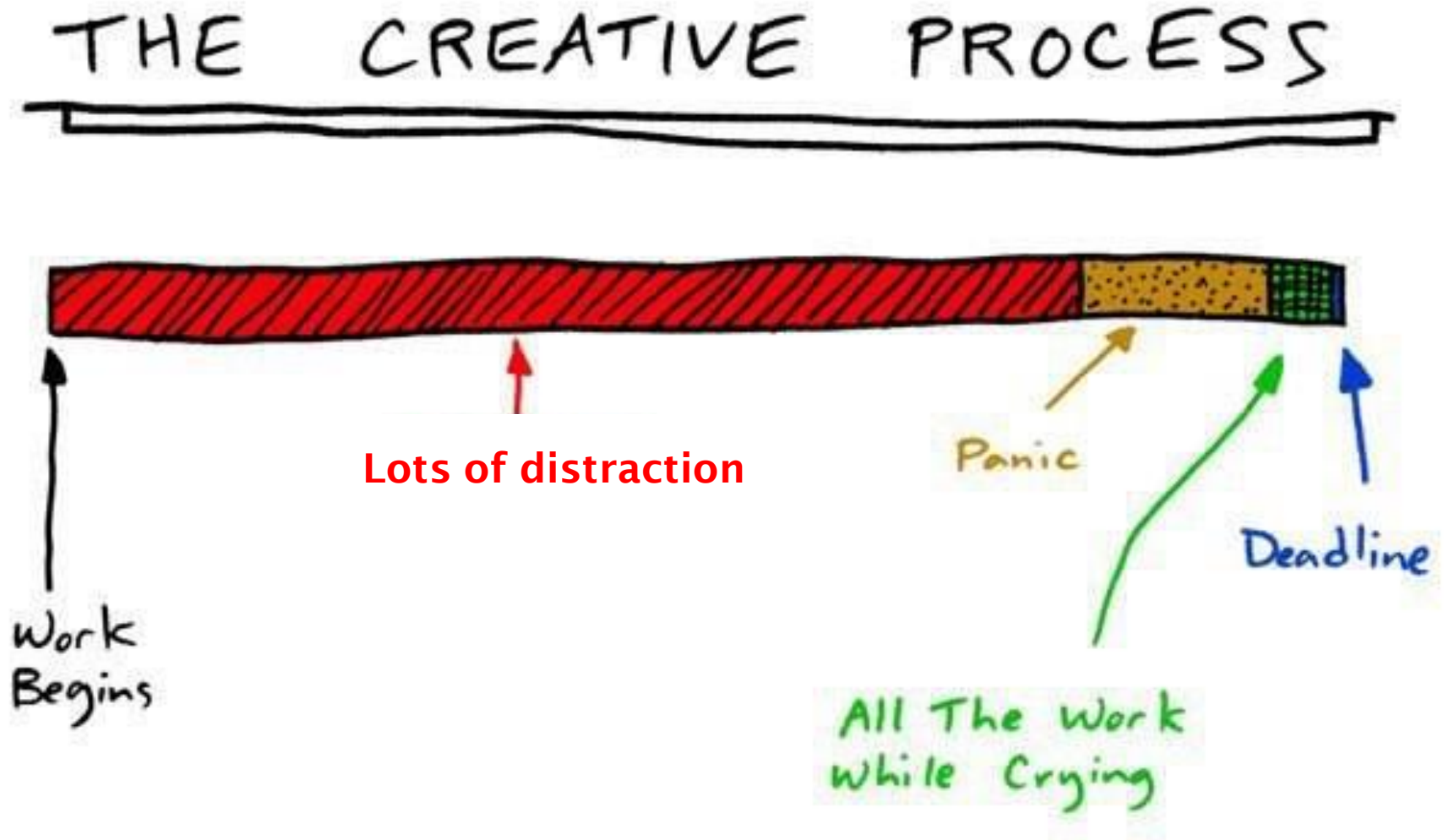
*nyc midnight*

- Flannery O'Connor





# If this were easy I would not be here.



A man with glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue shirt and dark trousers, stands on a stage. He is gesturing with his right hand, palm facing forward, while holding a small object in his left hand. Behind him is a large, dark screen displaying the text "Make me care." in white. To the left of the man are several tall, narrow, light-colored panels with faint, illegible text. The stage is dimly lit, with a red curtain visible in the background.

Make me care.

# Fundraising is quest for empathy







**EMOTION RULES.  
EVERYTHING ELSE DROOLS.**

# Why storytelling is the ultimate weapon

1. Stories are universal
2. They mirror human thought
3. The more absorbed we are in a story, the more it changes us
4. We read facts with skepticism
5. We quickly shed our skepticism when engaged in a story

“

Humans are to thinking as cats are to swimming. We can do it when we have to, but we'd much prefer not to.”

Daniel Kahneman, Thinking Fast and Slow



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# We must make donors FEEL in order to give

## Case Study: Plan UK

30 July 2013 by Jenna Pudelek, [1 comment](#)

The international charity's campaign Because I am a Girl generated 18,000 text donations

Remember your first period?  
Leaving school? Getting married?  
Having your first child?  
**Aneni does. She's twelve.**



**For some girls, starting their periods is the first step towards forced marriage.**

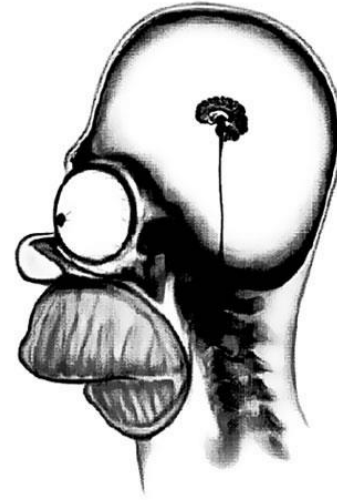
It means that they'll soon be taken out of school, isolated from their friends and forced into marriage with older men. Many will endure abuse. And every year, thousands will die in labour because their young bodies just aren't ready for childbirth.

As a woman, you understand just how terrible that is. And as a woman, you can do something about it – by helping Plan work with families and communities to keep young girls out of forced marriage. *Plan UK's hard-hitting campaign*

**Organisation:** [Plan UK](#)

**Campaign:** Because I am a Girl

**Must Read**



## USE EMOTION LIBERALLY

Emotion helps our brains navigate alternatives and make decisions



@rachelmuir @qgiv

“

People give for emotional reasons.  
Give your cat cat food.  
Give your donors  
emotional information.

Jeff Brooks







Emotions are your donors love potion

“



Like it or not, great fundraising is bursting with emotion. Using emotion in your fundraising is no more unethical than using oxygen to breathe.”

Jeff Brooks, Turn Your Words Into Money



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Why should I care?

Why should I give now?





# 3 ingredients to any story

Character

Desire

Conflict





# Storytelling tips for end of year

Want coaching from Rachel?  
[www.leagueofextraordinaryfundraisers.com](http://www.leagueofextraordinaryfundraisers.com)



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# The 1st gift is their attention







Attention isn't free.

# 1

Imagine  
giving this  
to your  
baby?



Catch their attention with a provocative opening.

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# Provocative opening

Dear Rachel,

How much of your life-savings  
would you like to leave in the hands of  
state and federal governments?

If you don't have a Will the law has  
already decided how your possessions  
and savings will be distributed!



Simple.

Easy to digest.

Memorable.



2 BABIES AT 16  
IS NOT GOOD.  
NEITHER IS HAVING YOUR  
STEPFATHER BE THE DAD.

- HUNTA



Can't use photos? Try silhouettes.



Make-A-Wish Foundation® of Canada  
2239 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3W6  
1-888-822-WISH www.makeawish.ca



Dear Friend,

There is absolutely nothing worse than watching your three-year-old child die. <- Powerful lead

And there is nothing better than stealing her back from heaven. <- Short sentences

My daughter Carlie came back from certain death thanks to people like you. <- Who would not want to be part of a group that could do something as wonderful as saving a child's life?

I hope you'll give me one minute of your time because I'm not a fundraiser, I'm a parent. And when I tell you my story I think you'll realize that you can make miracles happen . . . <- Creates a sense of "us": parents & grandparents

My daughter Carlie was a perfectly healthy child. Then one day she got a bad fever. We took her to the hospital only to discover every parent's nightmare. Carlie had cancer. <- Could happen to anyone

Acquisitional  
mailing Source:  
Sofii.org  
Author: Harvey  
McKinnon  
Results: Raised  
\$1.59 for each  
dollar spent  
Response rate >2%



Casual.  
Personal.  
Urgent.  
Repetitive.

P.S. If this were  
easy, I wouldn't  
be here.



Dear Rachel,

**When Jessica and her son Mark took refuge at Womenspace 20 years ago, neither understood the impact that one week would have on the rest of their lives.**

Jessica was pregnant and Mark was six years old. They were fleeing domestic violence after years of abuse.

Jessica hoped her son wouldn't remember that time in their lives – or the battles of his early childhood, before Womenspace.

What she didn't realize until recently: Mark remembers their week at Womenspace as one of the *best* times.

That's because **they found safety, healing, and hope here.**

“Womenspace helped me be there for him. They were there for me and we were all there for him. And he was able to maintain a childhood.”

-Jessica

“Even in our roughest times ...from her energy, everything was really good. She should be a very proud mother. Now I feel like as an adult, I can take on the world.”

-Mark

When you give to Womenspace, women and children in our community who call for

# Use compelling individual stories

This is a very difficult letter for me to write. But if telling you my story could help find my missing son, or prevent another child's abduction, I will gladly accept the heartache it brings me.



# SAFE | stop abuse for everyone

A merger of Austin Children's Shelter and SafePlace

Dear Rachel,

You know someone who's been abused, even if you don't know who it is.

**When I was trapped in an abusive marriage, decades ago, I didn't talk about what was happening to me.** I made excuses and kept up appearances.

In fact ... silence and secrets are what enable abuse of all kinds to thrive. Secrets help a child molester groom his victims. Silence enables a serial rapist to avoid detection.

My ex-husband and I separated when I was pregnant with my second child, but the stalking and abuse continued. When my baby was born, he needed to stay in the hospital for a few extra days. I knew I couldn't allow my family to come stay with me to help — it was too dangerous. So I left the hospital to take care of my 2 year old, and drove back every three hours to nurse my newborn. It was the only way I could keep everyone safe.

But by keeping quiet, I also started to feel responsible. The thought process went something like this: If I could just say and do everything right, he would stop being violent. And if he did get violent ... that meant I must have done something wrong.

**How many people do you think are living that way right now across Austin?** Trying to placate their partner's rage and violence every single night?



[illegible][illegible]



“ My child is dying. I can't choose when but please let me choose where.

Jack is my gorgeous 4 year old little boy who loves Mr Men.

Jack is currently in intensive care and I have been told he is going to die. I don't want him to die in hospital surrounded by machinery.

I want Jack to have nice clean shiny hair when he dies. I want to cuddle Jack in his Mr Men duvet when he dies. I want the last thing he hears to be my voice reading Mr Bump, his favourite bed time story when he does.

This would not happen in hospital so I choose to take Jack to Claire House.

At Claire House nurse Ruth helped me to wash Jack's hair with his own shampoo so he smelt like Jack; Heather put Jack's Mr Men duvet on so it felt like Jack's bed; and I cuddled Jack in his bed reading Mr Bump and I kissed Jack one last time before he died peacefully in my arms. Claire House helped me do this.

**We couldn't stop Jack from dying but with your donation Claire House can support mums like Helen to choose where Jack died and create memories that will last a life time.** ”



**Claire House**  
CHILDREN'S HOSPICE

Source: Alan Clayton, Great Fundraising

# A life story

# Start in the middle of the action ....

Let me tell you about Julia. When the ambulance brought her to the emergency room, all she could move were her eyes. Twelve years old. Hit and run. She was rushed into our examining room...





“

Telling stories is the virtual equivalent  
of taking your donors on a field trip.”

Carmine Gallo, Talk Like Ted

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# Behind the scenes storytelling ideas...

What are the stories behind your programs and services?

Might you...

- ✓ Chronicle a student's improvement?
- ✓ Follow a teen mom as she enrolls in your new parent program?
- ✓ Share a day in the life of a client, a client's child, a parent, or volunteer leading a program?
- ✓ Chronicle a day in the life at your food bank, teen center, etc from the viewpoint of an unexpected narrator, like an inanimate object?

# 2

These forgotten faces are the reason I'm writing to you today.

**They need your help.** *Especially in these tough times.* That's why I hope you'll send a gift to make a real and immediate difference in their lives:

Just €15 gives 10 homeless people a nutritious weekday lunch.  
Or €30 provides a hot cup of tea and breakfast for 20 homeless people.  
And €50 means that 25 homeless people can enjoy a Sunday roast dinner.

# Tell them what their gift will accomplish (something tangible)

@rachelmuir

[www.rachelmuir.com](http://www.rachelmuir.com)

Dear ,

Every night dozens of our neighbors have nowhere to call home. With your support, the XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Center helps our neighbors manage homelessness by offering temporary, emergency shelter. Our facility provides beds, showers, bathrooms, laundry, and a gathering place where people are shielded from the elements, day and night. This year, more than 500 men and women will find a place of refuge in our shelter.

**However, offering emergency shelter is only the first step.** With your help, we actively support our neighbors as they work to exit homelessness and return to permanent housing. With your help, we are not only keeping people safe, but also offering them a true second chance to reshape their lives and make homelessness a detour rather than the start of a downward spiral.

*Juana (54) and her mother, Dalmasia (75), came to XXXXXXXX when they could not find a family member. Juana says, "We are blessed we got into the shelter; XXXXXX like you are family." With assistance from our dedicated Help Center staff, the mother and daughter team are finding hope. The staff has given Juana employment assistance to help her to find a job, and the respite center gives Dalmasia a quiet place to rest and have her health issues addressed. They are on a path to permanent housing, a pathway made possible by your donors.*

Staff and volunteers welcome all, including those struggling with substance use disorders and mental health challenges, always seeing people as individuals, learning their names, hearing their stories, and responding effectively to help them fulfill their hopes. **This personal attention and a small financial investment change the trajectories of peoples' lives and allow them to draw on their natural resilience.** While we cannot reverse the immense weight that poverty places on many of our neighbors, every day we witness how a small investment can prevent the misfortune of homelessness from destroying lives.

**The need is great, and I hope you will give generously.** I look forward to continuing our collective effort to make XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX a place of compassion, community, and hope ... a place where our neighbors facing homelessness feel our support and encouragement.

Sincerely,

What will my gift do?



- Big doesn't motivate
- Solvable does



*\*Except for large scale natural disasters*

# Remember...

- Donors don't need training
- They need a problem
- It needs to be solvable
- They need to be the ones to solve it



# 3



Donor is hero (not you!)

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# Do the 'you' test – Double "you's"

Enter or paste text to analyze

Copy text

Analyze

Dear First Name,

When Maria, Diego and Kevin ask, Why can't I go to preschool today? the response comes with complicated words like: quarantine, coronavirus, and furlough. It's a complicated and uncertain time for everyone. And we know it is especially confusing for children who long for stability, familiarity, and routines of playing with friends.

Frankly, even we aren't absolutely sure when the Children's Learning Center will reopen, although we are aiming for mid-June -- a full three months since the coronavirus forced the Children's Learning Center, along with all schools and businesses in Vermont, to close for an undetermined length of time.

What we do know for sure is that we need your support now, like never before, to be able to give children a clean, sanitized and safe environment, in classrooms and on the playgrounds, where they can be virus-free from the moment they walk in the door to the moment they leave at the end of the day.

Before we can open the doors, we need to undertake some costly, thorough disinfecting of every room and every surface. And we'll need extra supplies to be able to do it again every day, several times a day.

It will require a new level of hyper vigilance and extra effort, on the part of teachers, parents, staff and even children. It will take a greater investment in extra safety materials like thermometers, plastic gloves, and gallons more soap and boxes more paper towels.

## Results

3230	Characters	2'22"	Reading Time
532	Words	25	Sentences

### The "You" Test

You used "you" words 4 times and "we" words 10 times. Ideally, you should use twice as many "you" words as "we" words. [Learn more](#)

Reading Level 11th grade

Your text is likely to be understood by a reader who has a least a 11th-grade reading level. The text should be between a 6th and 8th grade reading level and should be easy for most adults to read.

This is based on the Flesch-Kincaid reading levels. [Learn more](#)

[www.bloomerang.co/ahernaudit](http://www.bloomerang.co/ahernaudit)



Your communications = my mirror.



# “When you see...”

A homeless person sitting on a park bench, or sleeping under a bridge, you wonder what you should do. That’s the kind of person you are.”

Source: Jeff Brooks, [How to Turn Your Words into Money](#)



SECRETS TO TELLING GREAT

STORIES





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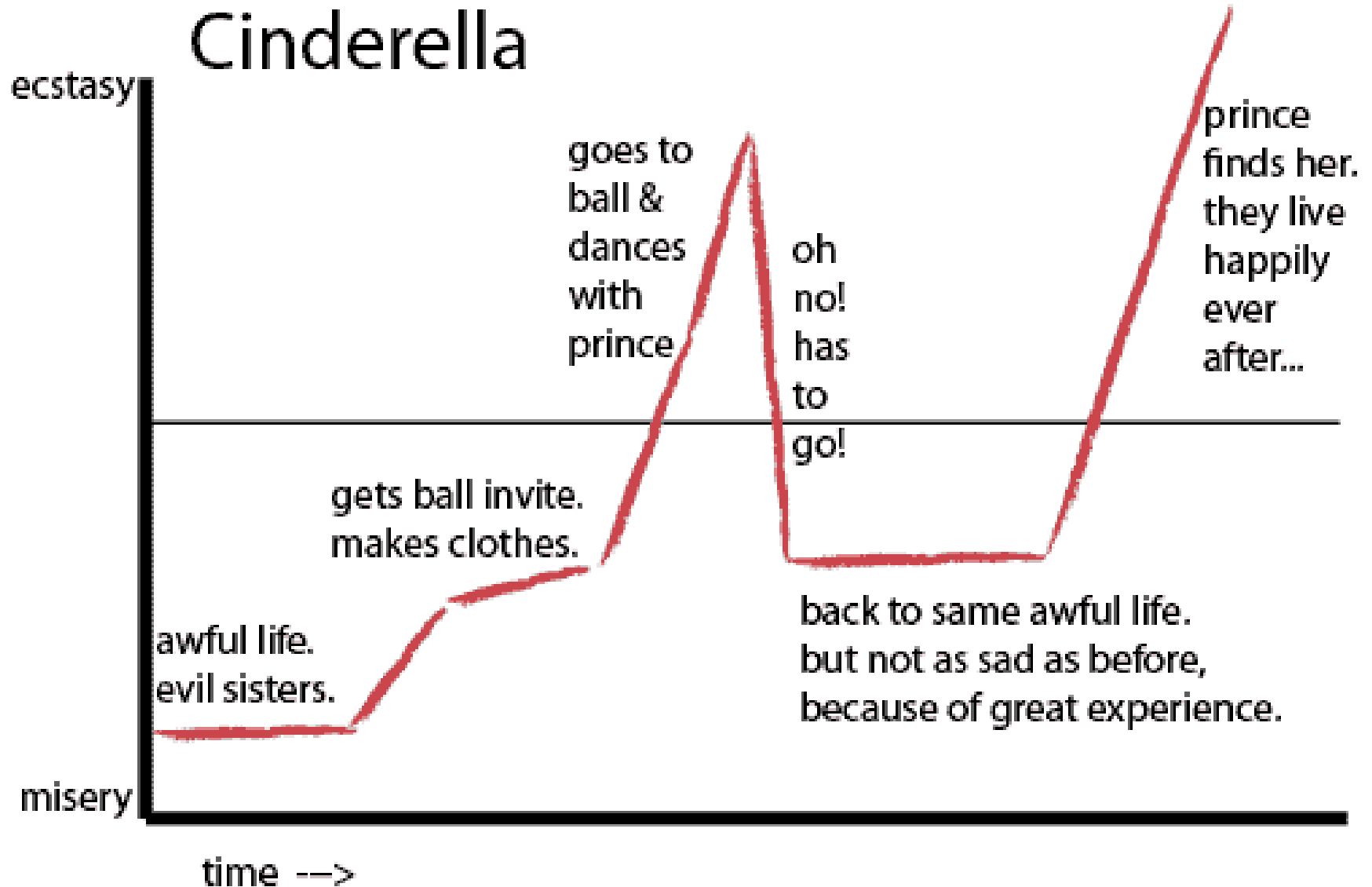


# STORYTELLING TIPS

- Good stories have conflict
- Think about your story like a movie with a beginning, middle and end
- Short - 2 minutes long
- Intensify with vivid language and intonation
- Fewer words build trust
- Lead with one central character (or family)
- The best stories make complex ideas simple
- Story is about cause or client, donor is hero



# Kurt Vonnegut - shape of stories



Don't tell it... **SHOW** ...it



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## Storytelling Makeover

### Before

A woman with keratoconus was helped by our agency.

Doctors couldn't help her but finally an ophthalmologist in her community was trained by one of our doctors.

He did a cornea transplant for her.

She's always wanted to see better and now she can!



SHOWING

## Storytelling Makeover

### After

Maria is 31 and lives in Mexico City. She has needed a cornea transplant her whole life.

From birth Maria's vision has been the equivalent of what we see when we look in a blurry, foggy bathroom mirror.

Thanks to our generous donors we trained doctors in Mexico to do these transplants.

Maria was our first patient. Her surgery was a huge success.

Immediately afterwards she saw the faces of her 7 and 9 year old boys for the **very first time.**

Source: Lori Jacobwith, [boring2brilliant.com](http://boring2brilliant.com)



# TIPS TO CREATE A CULTURE OF STORYTELLING

# Don't ask programs for stories. Ask questions...

- Who did you turn away?
- What made them come to us for services? What are we able to do for them? What are we not able to do for them?
- Is there anyone you met lately that made you feel so proud we exist?



Source: Boring 2 Brilliant,  
Author Lori Jacobwith





Set a model example & support training

Reward great storytelling

Add to employee job description

Kick off staff/board meetings with storytelling

Tips to create a culture of storytelling





**DO YOU KNOW  
WHAT STORIES  
YOUR DONORS  
WANT TO HEAR?**



# What you think of when you think of Habitat for Humanity?







Questions?



Start in the  
middle of the  
action

Start with  
quote

Use an  
unexpected  
narrator  
(inanimate  
object etc)

Paint a  
picture

Open with  
a startling  
truth

## 5 story starters you can steal

Source: Laurel Dykema, Mission India  
<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/>



Virtual stewardship:  
[www.rachelmuir.com/virtual](http://www.rachelmuir.com/virtual)

## How to Steward & Cultivate Donors in a Virtual World



*Rachel*  
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# Live monthly workshop & workbook only \$49

End of Year  
Fundraising  
Made Easy

September

Giving Tuesday  
+Last Minute  
Guide to Year  
End Gifts

October

Science of  
Storytelling to  
Make the Case

November



**LEAGUE OF  
EXTRAORDINARY  
FUNDRAISERS**

[LeagueofExtraordinaryFundraisers.com](http://LeagueofExtraordinaryFundraisers.com)

# What's in a \$49 monthly membership?

- Live monthly workshop
- Access to all past workshops
- Workbooks, guides, templates & scripts
- 1.5 CFRE credits for EVERY workshop
- Members only Q&A (and Facebook group)


PLUS...

Upgrade anytime to get WEEKLY coaching calls with Rachel (\$149 a month)



# Join for instant access to all workshops

**What the Best  
Fundraisers  
Do Differently**



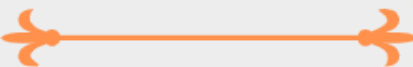
**Change Your  
Board & Get  
Them  
Fundraising**



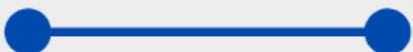
**How to Convert  
More Online  
Gifts**



**Use Donor  
Surveys to  
Boost Gifts**



**Winning  
Email  
Appeals**



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“My favorite thing about the program is how darned USEFUL it is and how personal and available to help Rachel is.”

~ **Lea Thomas, Membership Director**



“I will say this to anyone considering Rachel as their coach - it’s the best decision you can make if you want to become a better fundraising professional!”

~ **Jay Scott, Development Director**



“**Being a part of the Elite Fundraising group is a total game changer for me as a one-person development shop.** Rachel is an inspiring fundraising coach who reignites my love for the work every week.” ~ **Renee Boyle**

## Enroll now at

# LeagueofExtraordinaryFundraisers.com

Questions? [Rachel@rachelmuir.com](mailto:Rachel@rachelmuir.com)

Workshops \$49/mo Coaching \$149/mo

## Monthly workshops

### **April**

Fundraising in  
Turbulent Times

### **May**

The Donor Experience &  
How to Convert More  
Online Gifts

### **June**

Upgrade Donors &  
Boost Revenue with  
Donor Surveys

### **July**

What the Best  
Fundraisers Do  
Differently

### **August**

How to Change the  
Board You Have & Get  
Them Fundraising

### **September**

End of Year Fundraising  
Made Easy

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# Thank you!



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Today's slides

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