



# IGNITED FUNDRAISING

FUEL TO IGNITE YOUR FUNDRAISING



## Boring 2 Brilliant:

*Finding and sharing stories  
that cause people to take action*



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## Introduction

Storytelling is an ancient practice of conveying events in words, images, and sounds. From what I can tell, stories have been shared in every culture as a means of entertainment, education, preservation of culture, and to instill knowledge, values, and morals. As human beings we have communicated with each other through storytelling since we lived in caves and sat around campfires.

The truth is, we are connected to others through the stories we tell or they share with us. You may not always remember the facts about how many homeless there are in your city but you ARE likely to remember the feeling you had about a story of the homeless family and the day-to-day struggles they face.

I believe it is the most powerful way to connect people to your mission...to tell a story that causes the listener to feel something about the work of your organization. The easiest way to do this is by sharing an example of how your work affects one man, woman, or child.

Maya Angelou says it best, *“People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.”*

I’ve listened to and re-told hundreds of stories over the past twelve years, maybe even thousands. When I retell a story, my secret is making the effort to fill in the words that are NOT BEING SPOKEN, words that will cause others to feel something.

In this book you are getting my special “insiders coaching” to help you share a story that is emotionally connecting, causes the listener to feel something, and in turn causes them to want to take action on behalf of the person you are talking about.

People give their time, money, and advice to organizations they feel emotionally connected to. So, telling a story about how you change the lives of the real people who come into contact with your organization is critical in generating more funds for your work.

It is important to build your muscles in this area. Often we become somewhat removed from the work of our organization for a variety of reasons or we become “hardened” to the emotionally wrenching stories.

I am not asking you to cry and feel awful each time you tell a story. I’m asking you to connect to your own feelings about how that person and their story moves you and share that with someone else.

Most important in the storytelling process is practice. You’ll want to share the stories you have often, in different settings, and invite feedback so you can truly move them from boring to brilliant.

Wishing you a prosperous fundraising year!

Lori L. Jacobwith  
*Chief Fundraising Culture Changer and Master Storyteller*  
Ignited Fundraising



“Your story should have a moment that paints a picture.”

## Where Do I Find Good Stories to Share?

When I invite someone to tell me a story about the impact of their work I'm often met with that "deer in the headlights" look of fear. And then the words start to tumble out:

*"Um, but, I don't meet any of our clients."*

---

*"I don't know any stories about our work."*

---

*"Uh, well, the program staff are the ones who know the people we serve but when I ask them to tell me stories they give me one line or they ignore me."*





If this sounds like YOU, read on.



The magic in finding stories is two-fold:

## FIRST: WHAT QUESTIONS YOU ASK

If your program staff truly DOES have the only access to your clients and you want stories about the impact of your work, rather than asking for stories here are other questions to ask, especially program staff:

-  Who did you turn away last week? Tell me about one of those people or families.
-  What person, family, child, senior, or fill-in-the-blank has stayed on your mind this week? Why did they come in to ask for our services? What are we doing to help them? What are we not able to do for them?
-  What is your favorite thing about this person? Why do you want to help them?
-  Is there anyone you've met lately who made you feel incredibly proud that we exist? Tell me about them and how YOU inadvertently or directly helped them.

Rather than asking staff, especially program staff for stories, ask them questions. Start a staff meeting with one of these questions. At the start of the staff meeting flesh out one real-life example of how your organization is making a difference saving or changing lives.

Help your team help you collect and share real-life examples of the people's lives you are saving and changing. And then go share them with others.

## SECOND: WHO YOU ASK QUESTIONS

Asking your colleagues, especially the front line staff, the questions listed here WILL help you capture more and better quality information for your story sharing.

When I worked at organizations where we provided a direct service I would make sure to put myself in a position at least once a month to be around those we served. I sat in the lobby area at the Department of Ophthalmology and visited with patients; I took the phone calls from parents whose children had just been diagnosed with Juvenile Diabetes; I attended volunteer trainings. I got out of my office and made sure to connect one-on-one with people to learn their story.

Permission to share someone's story is key, but once YOU establish a relationship that permission is an easier process to navigate.

I believe there are LOTS of other people to ask open-ended questions who have great examples of why your organization is doing amazing work.

## Who to Ask Your Open-Ended Questions?

WHO TO ASK	SAMPLE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS
People you serve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was your life like before you came here?</li> <li>• How has our team helped you?</li> <li>• What is your life like now?</li> </ul>
Family members of people you serve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the differences you've seen in your loved-one's life since they came to us?</li> </ul>
Board members and former members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did you join our board?</li> <li>• What is the most important part of our work for you?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?*</li> </ul>
Long-time donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you make a financial gift to us?</li> <li>• What is special for you about our work?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>
First-time donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What brought you to us in the first place?</li> <li>• What is special for you about our work?</li> </ul>
Other staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>
Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why have you funded our programs?</li> <li>• What is different/special about our work that compels your foundation to make a grant?</li> </ul>
Event sponsors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you know about our work?</li> <li>• Why do you make a financial gift to us?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" you remember about someone who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>
Vendors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you know about our work?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" that you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>
Elected officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you know about our work?</li> <li>• Do you have a special "mission moment" that you remember about someone you met who was helped by our organization?</li> </ul>

\* This question can be asked of nearly anyone you come into contact with. It's powerful and a great conversation starter.



## Lori's Storytelling Criteria

The foundation of good storytelling starts here:

**A)**

**Tell a story about an actual person using name/age descriptors so your listener can visualize.**

**B)**

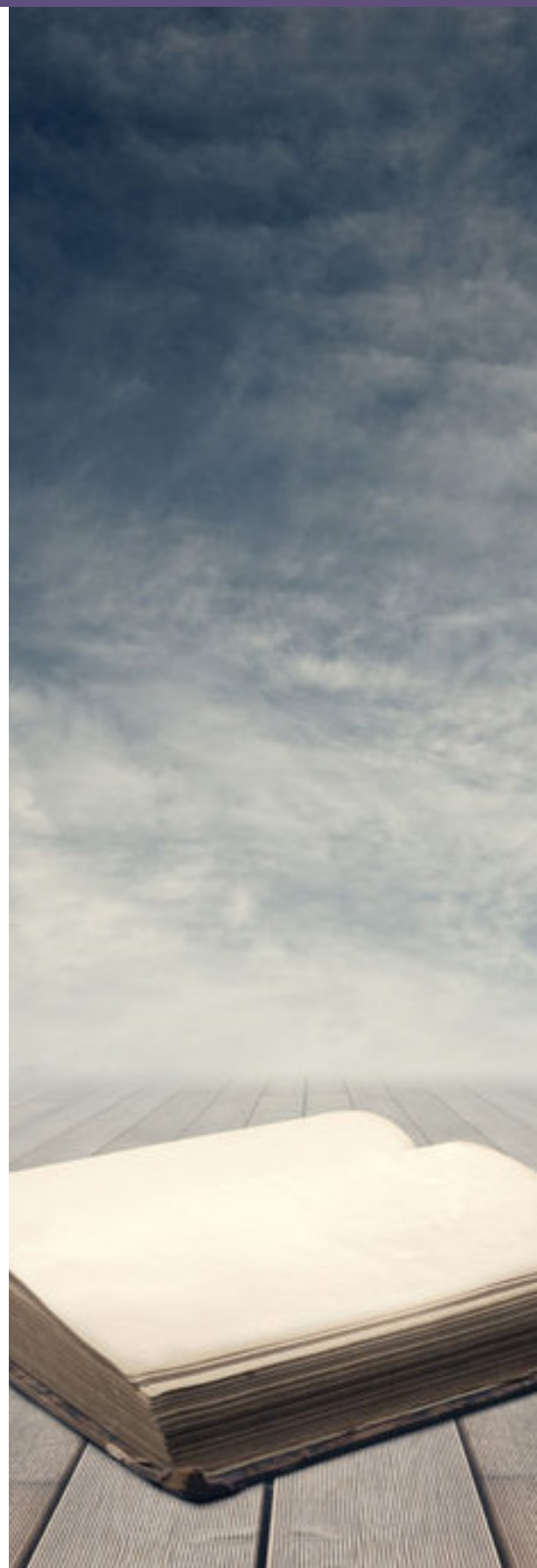
**Use words that emotionally connect the listener to your work and the person you're speaking about. NO JARGON.**

**C)**

**Share specific examples of YOUR work and how it makes a difference in the life of a real person.**

**D)**

**The story must be short—2 minutes or less.**

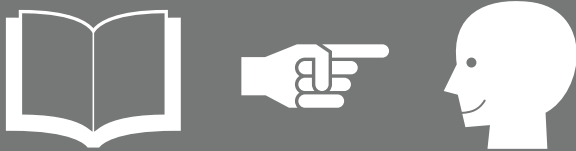




## Seven Rules of Storytelling

### 1. STORIES SHOULD BE ABOUT REAL PEOPLE

Ideally, stories about those who need something that YOUR organization provides.



### 2.

ALLOW THE PERSON IN YOUR STORY TO HAVE A REAL NAME, AGE, AND TO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

HELLO  
MY NAME IS

### 4. KEEP YOUR STORY SHORT

6 words to 2 minutes works best.



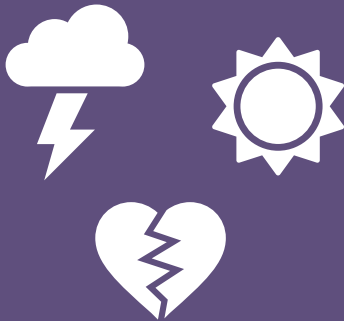
In about 4 - 10 seconds your listeners tune out if you haven't grabbed them. Don't tell them you are going to tell them a story about someone, just tell it. Start with the person's name, age, and a few descriptive words.

### 3. MINDS WANDER REALLY QUICKLY



### 5. ALLOW YOUR STORY TO ELICIT AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

Anger, sadness, happiness, pride—it doesn't matter what the emotion is, but your listeners should feel **something**.



### 7. THE BEST STORIES ARE TOLD BY THE PERSON THEMSELVES

Clients telling their own stories are the most moving way to share how your organization makes a difference.



### 6.

YOUR STORY SHOULD HAVE A MOMENT THAT PAINTS A PICTURE

Encourage your listeners to see themselves or someone in their lives. It could be aging parents, the daughter of the person who makes their latte or takes their bank deposits, or even their own children.





## Six-Step Process for Creating Your Brilliant, Emotionally Connecting Story

- 1** *Identify one person* (only one) who stands out for you as someone who has benefitted from your programs, has been a real success story for your organization, OR could have been a success if you had more resources.
- 2** *Learn their first name, age,* and describe some characteristics of their personality or how they look.
- 3** *Write down all of the exact results* that man, woman, or child got from being served by your organization. Be very specific. Did he get a job? Stop drinking or using? Did she get her diploma? Did that child have someone to trust for the very first time? Did that teenager start to make choices that were not harmful?
- 4** *Make a list of the transformations that person experience as a result of those results.* Take some time and make the list as long as possible. Make sure to use words that are feeling words rather than “reporting” words.  
  
With someone to trust for the first time, did the teen start getting better grades in school? Have spent less time suspended or in the principal’s office? Did he or she feel like they fit in better? Did she begin to look and feel differently because her self-confidence and energy were higher?
- 5** *You now have a list with many words and phrases perfect for crafting your story.* Underline or circle the words that resonate with you; that cause you to feel something.
- 6** Now fit the story into the framework and practice telling your story. *Often.*

Now, it’s time to put those words and phrases together to begin to tell the three parts of the story (see template on page 9).

**A. What life was like before your organization was involved?**

**B. What happened when your organization got involved with this person or family?**

**C. What is life like now?** Show the hope and future here OR show how the ending that is not yet finished and could be changed with more time, support, and resources given to your organization.



## Before and After Example

When I worked at the Department of Ophthalmology in Tucson, Arizona this “story” was shared with me:

**BORING**

### BEFORE

*“A woman with keratoconus was helped by our organization. Over the years no doctors had been able to help her with her vision problems. Finally an ophthalmologist in her community that had been trained by our doctors performed cornea transplant surgery on her. She’s always wanted to have better vision and after her doctor operated she can see better now.”*

**2**

### AFTER—LORI’S VERSION

*“Sondra is 27 and lives in Sonora, Mexico, just south of Tucson where the Department of Ophthalmology is located. She’s a tall woman with long brown hair, but there is no spring in her step or smile on her face. She’s been in need of cornea transplant surgery her whole life. I’m not exactly sure what that surgery is, but I know that when Sondra wakes up each morning and looks in the mirror as she’s washing her face, the mirror is cloudy, like there is soap on it. And there is no color. The very blurry images she sees are black and white.*

*With contributions from our supporters we have created an international fellows program where we teach doctors from other countries how to perform cornea transplant surgery. Dr. Rodriguez, Sondra’s doctor, was the first recipient of our fellows program. When he was fully trained he decided to offer one surgery to his community for free each year. Sondra was his first recipient.*

*She was very grateful to us for training her doctor because on the day of her surgery **she was able to see the faces of her seven and nine-year-old little boys for the very first time.***

*Now Sondra works outside her home and experience a freedom she’s never had before. Her smile will light up a room and there is a sparkle in her eye of gratitude and love for the Department of Ophthalmology and her favorite doctor.”*

**BRILLIANT**

**Count how many “feeling and descriptive” words were used in this story.  
Do your stories paint a clear picture for your listeners or readers?**



## Simple Template for Moving Your Story from Boring 2 Brilliant

Let me tell you about:

---

---

---

---

*(Fill in their name, age, and a few descriptive details about them.)*

His/her life was:

---

---

---

---

*(Share specific details about how they felt about their choices, unasked for situation, health issue, etc. You get the idea.) Special note: Stay away from jargon and “grant-writer” speak.*

\_\_\_\_\_ made his/her way to us because:

---

---

---

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*(Share how the person found you or your programs. Be specific. A helicopter didn’t drop them off. Maybe ten other homeless shelters turned them down or their doctor or landlord referred them to you.)*



## Simple Template for Moving Your Story from Boring 2 Brilliant (continued)

Here's how our organization helped:

---

---

---

---

*(Be specific here. As you share examples of your work or the impact your staff has had be sure to choose engaging language and share what the person in your story felt about your support/work/program.)*

Because of our work: \_\_\_\_\_ is now: \_\_\_\_\_

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*(What are the exact results AND transformations your main character is experiencing? Remember: even if you are serving the environment or an advocacy organization you are still talking about one person whose life is different because of your work.)*

This is just one of thousands of stories I could share with you about how we:

---

---

---

---

*(Explain briefly how you save or change lives.)*

**Count how many “feeling and descriptive” words were used in this story.  
Do your stories paint a clear picture for your listeners or readers?**





## *The Four Parts of a Great Story\** by Mark Rovner

### A RELATABLE PROTAGONIST

That means an individual, not a group or institution! The protagonist has to be facing something with which we can relate. What unites us are the trials and tribulations of being human.



### LOTS OF CONFLICT

Conflict is story oxygen. The more conflict, the more engaging the story.



### A LOATHSOME VILLAIN

Name names, or make clear what tough obstacle is in the way of our hero.



### TELLING DETAILS

If a story element can't connect with one of five senses, be suspicious of it.



\*From [Katya's Nonprofit Marketing Blog](#)

## How to Invite Support Without Saying “We NEED Your Help”

**NEED** is a word I’m not a fan of using when talking to supporters.

It’s a word that is all about **YOU** and can feel like you expect me to do something. When you expect something from most people, they are turned off and often don’t respond.



A “**need**” exists because something is missing.

In your communication, especially your storytelling, focus on the impact of what is missing for a real person rather than what you expect me to do about it.

If I feel compelled by your language choices, your message can create action without even asking me to do anything.

Fundraising is about being connected by our common passions and values.

The work you do at your organization allows people to feel great when they support you, using the word **NEED** can remove the feeling good part of the experience.

## Checklist for Ways to Say You Need Help Without Using the Word “NEED”

1. What's missing is \_\_\_\_\_
2. Together we will \_\_\_\_\_
3. With support from our community we will be able to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. More resources allow us to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Here's our vision for the future and what it will take to get there: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Our current level of resources don't allow us to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. We are working to eliminate our current funding gap of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. The demand for our services is increasing faster than our annual fundraising can grow.
9. When we have additional resources we will \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Your gifts create an impact. More gifts = more impact.
11. Here's how you can make a difference/impact: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Words and Phrases That Evoke Emotion

There are many, many words that do a good job of evoking emotion. This list was created to help get you started crafting your story and to spark more ideas. Begin to take notice throughout your day of the words that make you feel something and incorporate those into the stories you share.

Remember though, the placement of these words and phrases is key to creating a powerful story.

*A place to call my own*

*Abandoned*

*Ashamed*

*Awkward*

*Blessed*

*Bright*

*Catapult*

*Delight*

*Emotionally bruised*

*Empower*

*Erupt in anger*

*Even out the odds*

*Explosive anger*

*Exuberant*

*Eyes pooled with tears*

*Fleeting feelings of \_\_\_\_\_*

*Gentle*

*Glowing smile*

*Gnarly hands*

*Healthy*

*Joy*

*Kind*

*Leathery hands/skin*

*Lifeline*

*Overcome*

*Passionate*

*Precious*

*Ravenous*

*Revitalize*

*Safe*

*Surrender*

*Thrive*

*Tired eyes*

*Uncomfortably shy*

*Unrestrained excitement*

*Vibrant*

*Weary*

*Weather*



## Seven Best Practices for Fundraising Speakers

1

### GAIN AUDIENCE ATTENTION AND INTEREST

- 🔥 HEAR them.
- 🔥 Ask a question they have to think about.
- 🔥 Get a raise of hands.
- 🔥 Be sure your remarks, speech, presentation feels like it is about THEM in some way.

2

### ESTABLISH YOUR OWN CREDIBILITY AND APPROACHABILITY

- 🔥 This is critical when speaking.
- 🔥 This is where you can insert a short story to connect more deeply.
- 🔥 Include some of your most relevant and/or impactful “stats.”

3

### SHARE THREE MAIN CONCEPTS

- 🔥 Put your remarks or your presentation into “buckets” with interesting, engaging titles.
- 🔥 Of course you can and will want to include sub topics in those “buckets” to cover all you want to, but remember: Less is more.
- 🔥 Too many topics can be confusing and your audience loses interest.

4


### MAKE IT EASY TO FOLLOW ALONG

- 🔥 Make sure you keep your talk/presentation orderly by reminding the audience where you are in the overall outline.
- 🔥 Do this visually with a common graphic or numbers or verbally with a transition phrase or numbers. (e.g., Let’s dive into my third point: “Why your investment makes such an impact.”)

## Seven Best Practices for Fundraising Speakers (continued)

5


### TRANSITIONS ARE KEY


 The best presentations flow with transitions that are virtually invisible.

6

### GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR INSERTING STORIES/IMPACT EXAMPLES

 Three stories in a short, seven-minute speech.

 You may absolutely use more people examples or “stories” in a longer presentation but make them relevant and short.


 Use them:


- To emphasize your point
- To insert drama, clarity, humor
- As a transition
- To close your remarks/presentation

7

### MY BIGGEST PET PEEVE: DO NOT USE THE PHRASE “IN CLOSING...”

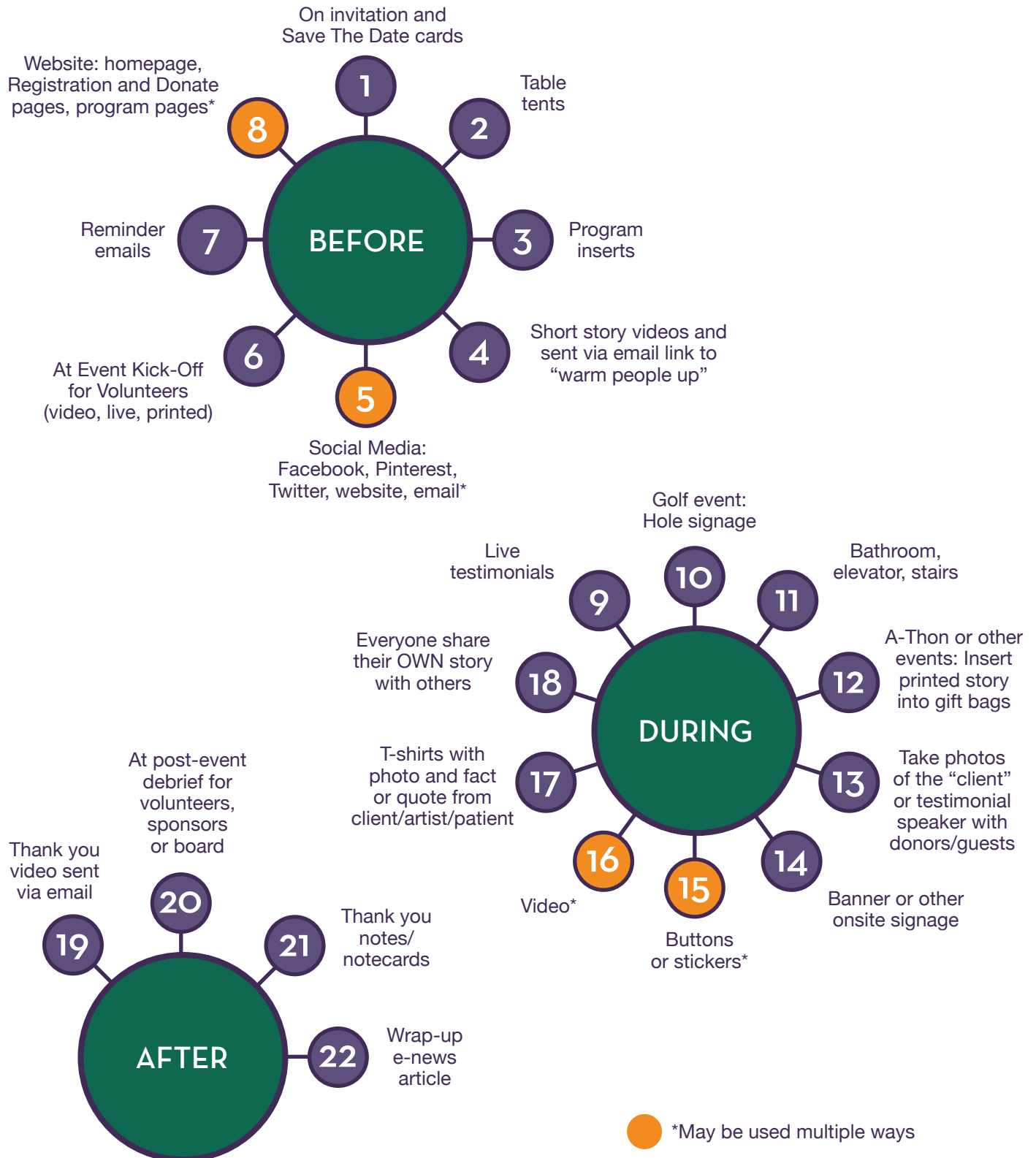
 We all know that you’ll stop talking eventually, so do that. But do it in a “conversational” format.

 They are listening and you are talking, but in an exceptional speech or presentation you’ve had them following you closely and they are ready for the finale.

 One trick I use: I often ask, “What will you do differently after today?”

Sometimes I have the opportunity to hear their answers out loud, sometimes not. The question shifts listeners to the wrap up while getting them into action about what they just heard.

## 20+ Places To Share Your Story At Nonprofit Events



## Additional Resources

### **Blog Posts**

- [Letting Go Frees Your Organization to Get the Story Right](#)
- [The Biggest Challenge Facing Nonprofits](#)
- [Infusing Your Missing Into Your Events](#)
- [Why Fundraisers are Failing at Storytelling & What They Need to Change](#)

### **Free Ignited Fundraising Training**

From free Workbooks and eBooks to templates to help you work with your board you will find something that can ignite your fundraising right now.

[>> Learn more](#)

### **Imagine What's Possible Step-By-Step Storytelling System**

Do you want to cause bigger & more frequent contributions? Do you want to create unforgettable connections with your supporters?

[>> Learn more](#)



## About Lori

Lori L. Jacobwith is a nationally-recognized master storyteller and culture change expert. With more than 25 years' experience, her strategies and coaching have helped nonprofit organizations raise \$250 million dollars from individual donors. And counting. The Giving Show has recognized her as one of the top 40 most effective fundraising consultants in the U.S.

Grounded in her experience as both a former nonprofit executive director and development director, Lori has honed her vast expertise into actionable, creative, and successful tools to teach staff and board members to powerfully share people and money stories to ignite action and raise more money. Her one-of-a-kind approach is used by thousands of people across North America.

In addition to her [must-read blog](#), Lori is also the author of [Nine Steps to a Successful Fundraising Campaign](#) and the co-author of [The Essential Fundraising Handbook for Small Nonprofits](#). In response to overwhelming demand for innovative tools, Lori created the [Imagine What's Possible Step-by-Step Storytelling System](#) to help catapult nonprofits to unbelievable levels of effectiveness.

A longtime member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Lori holds a BA from the University of Minnesota and additional training from Indiana University's Fund Raising School. In addition to her passion for fundraising, Lori has attended her native Minnesota State Fair—a favorite summer activity—for more than 50 consecutive years.

*Receive daily coaching tips from Lori on [Facebook](#) or follow her on Twitter [@Ljacobwith](#)*

