

What we're reading: Emotionraising

People are driven by emotion, and for good reason. If an early human saw a lion, fear would alert him to the danger and help him survive. When a mother hears her baby cry, emotion and empathy drive her to help the child, ensuring her genes will live on. Today, these primal responses also influence our decisions about what to wear, what to buy and, yes, what charitable causes to support.

In “Emotionraising: How to astonish, disturb, seduce and convince the brain to support good causes,” author Francesco Ambrogetti analyzes the science behind our emotional responses, and shows how nonprofits can use this information to increase community involvement. Translated from the Italian, the book could have benefited from stronger editing, but it’s nonetheless interesting and informative.

Ambrogetti shows how *emotions are twice as important as facts* in consumers’ decision to buy a product. He goes on to demonstrate that an approach that targets an emotional response also works in the nonprofit world. We think he offers some intriguing recommendations for converting feelings into funds. For example:

Positive emotions (for example, a feeling of hope that a contribution will make a difference) are also key — and make people more likely to give. Positive and negative emotions, Ambrogetti adds, “play a complementary role in motivating people to donate, and even determine the ability to donate.” And stories “with a positive outcome worked better also in terms of the value of donations received,” he adds.

Use sensory language. Words linked to our senses evoke a strong emotional response. Brain scans, Ambrogetti notes, show that the same area of the brain lights up when reading a sensory word as when actually experiencing the sensation: Just reading the word “fragrance” has the same effect on the brain as actually smelling something, for example.

Language connected with the other senses yields similar results. One study cited by Ambrogetti found that restaurant food described with sensory adjectives resulted in 27-percent higher sales than food described with more neutral language. And, Ambrogetti adds, customers even said they were more satisfied after eating food described using sensory adjectives!

“Words with a strong sensorial connotation...have a great capacity to excite donors,” too, he notes.

Some might argue that using people’s emotions is exploitative. As Ambrogetti emphasizes, though, we’re appealing to people’s emotions on a subconscious level whether we do so knowingly or not. Better, he advises, to use the power of emotions more intentionally, for good.

You, too, can use the power of emotions to help engage people in your nonprofit organization's work. And that, Ambrogetti reports, increases both contributions and retention.

To learn how Thurlow/Associates can help your organization leverage the power of emotions to support your mission, contact us for a no-cost consultation. You can reach us at (310) 675-6497 or at hello@thurlowassociates.com.