

STORYTELLING FOR YEAR-END CAMPAIGNS

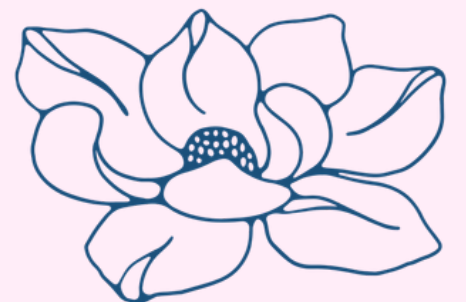
Stories that stand out, stick and support your fundraising efforts

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Magnolia Media Group



WHO WE ARE

*Magnolia Media Group **helps nonprofits & big-hearted businesses tell their story well.***



HOW TO TELL STORIES THAT INSPIRE PEOPLE TO GIVE!

*HINT: YOU DON'T NEED A MASSIVE MARKETING BUDGET;
YOU NEED A BETTER STORY.*

YOUR CAMPAIGN ISN'T

- ✗ An email
- ✗ A Facebook post
- ✗ A direct mail letter
- ✗ Giving Tuesday

It is one compelling message told consistently everywhere.

Ask yourself: Why do some campaigns raise millions of dollars and others get ignored?

THINK ABOUT...

The last nonprofit email you deleted without opening.

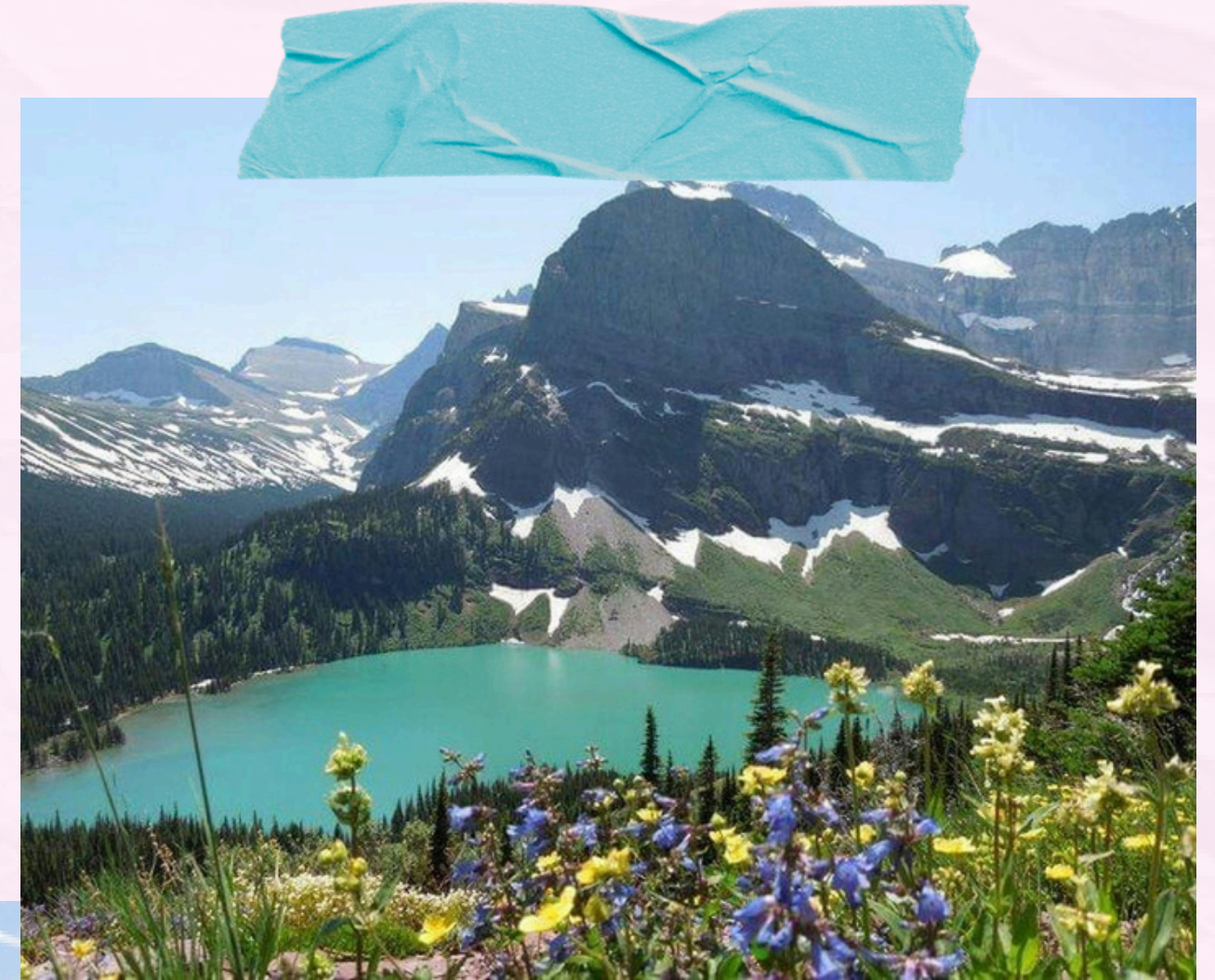
Versus: The last nonprofit communication that made you cry... or laugh... or donate.

BE HUMAN!

I GAVE BECAUSE

**of a simple story of a story
about staff's favorite parks.
It connected with of my
own memories, and I
became a monthly donor**

THAT SIMPLE.



BE HUMAN!

Georgia wellness hosted an event where a staff member and single mom shared her story.

I BECAME A MONTHLY DONOR, TOO!



PEOPLE DON'T DONATE TO...

Programs
Statistics
Organizations
Needs
Scare tactics

THEY DONATE TO...

Hope
Transformation
Belonging
People
Possibility



BOTTOM LINE

*People don't give because of your mission.
They give because they FEEL connected to someone or
something inside of your mission!*

THE ONE VS THE MANY

**“If I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will,”
-Mother Teresa**



Psychic numbing - as numbers grow, compassion often shrinks

Source: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/judgment-and-decision-making/article/if-i-look-at-the-mass-i-will-never-act-psychic-numbing-and-genocide/0E55D099E133068F9ACD5A0DBBE1E4E2>

CHARITY: WATER

One village.
One person.
Beautiful visuals.
Transparent impact.



IN 2025 ALONE, THEY RAISED \$75 MILLION WITH THESE METHODS!



The Road that Changed Everything | charity: water

charitywater



Watch on  YouTube

THREE TYPES OF FUNDRAISING STORIES

**THE APPEAL STORY
THE THANK YOU STORY
THE IMPACT STORY**

THE APPEAL STORY

ITS JOB:

To Invite the Donor to Give!

This is type of story your donor will come across most often.

*(Psssst, this is also where
most orgs go wrong!)*

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

DESCRIPTION (WRONG)

Every year, thousands of single parents in our community face housing difficulty. Rising rents, lack of affordable options and complex application processes make it nearly impossible for working families to secure safe, stable homes.

Our Housing Response Team provides emergency assistance, department support and rapid move-in services for families.

THIS IS ALL TRUE, BUT IT MISSES THE POINT.

IT READS LIKE A WEATHER REPORT FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S STORM.

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

STORY (RIGHT!)

He thought that he was just going to look at an apartment with his mom. Liam was six. He didn't understand how housing applications worked. All he knew was the place had carpet and a window shaped like a rainbow — and while it sounded nice, he wondered what happened to make them have to leave their old home.

His mom, Mary, told him they'd just go in, but when she buckled him back into the car without saying a word, he asked, "Did I do something wrong?"

She didn't answer because if she said one word, she'd cry, and she couldn't afford to cry in front of him again.

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

BREAKING IT DOWN

“DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG?”

This question and tension keeps the donor reading.

They are no longer evaluating your organization. Instead they are sitting the car with a six-year-old little boy who is asking if he did something wrong.

THE OFFER: TELLS THE DONOR WHAT THEIR GIFT WILL DO

THE ASK: INVITES THEM TO GIVE

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

THE OFFER & ASK

For just \$50, you can give Mary and Liam a safe place to sleep tonight. Your gift tells a little boy, “No you didn't do something wrong”. It shows a mom, “You're not in this alone.”

Mary works two jobs. She does everything right but when her landlord raised the rent by \$400 she couldn't keep up. Every apartment she applies for either requires months of pay stubs or vanishes before she can even get there. Liam has been living out of the backseat of her car.

Will you give \$50 so Mary and Liam have a safe place to sleep tonight? Because right now there's a little boy buckled in the back seat wondering if he will ever sleep in a real bed again.

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

THE APPEAL STORY LIVES IN THE MOMENT BEFORE HELP ARRIVES

The appeal story gives the donor a chance to step in.
The next story arrives right after they do, to make the
donor glad that they gave.

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

THE THANK YOU STORY

ITS JOB: LEAVE THE DONOR GLAD THAT THEY GAVE

A few days (hopefully, often longer) after donating you receive something like this:

“Thank you for your generous gift. Your support is appreciated and helps us continue our important work.” (Meh.)

You gave because you care, you felt good that you gave — and this is kind of a letdown. You’re looking for reassurance that you made the right choice!

THE MOMENT AFTER A GIFT ARRIVES IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN THE DONOR RELATIONSHIP.

Try something like this instead....

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

THE THANK YOU STORY

Dear [Name],

Just down the road, a single mom had triple-checked the locks on her car door and parked near a streetlight each night to keep her child safe while she slept. When we handed her the keys to her apartment, she didn't say a word. She just thumbed the key in her hand, marveling that it was real. Today she and her son are moving into their own place and can finally sleep safely through the night. All thanks to you!

Feel the difference? This isn't about your organization or a blanket thank you. This is personal and reassures the donor of who they are.

The thank you story should arrive a day or two after the gift is made.

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

WHAT MAKES THIS WORK?

1. **It drops the donor into a specific moment.**

- *The mom living in her car and her first good night's sleep. Doesn't have to be dramatic, just specific and real.*

2. **It pulls the donor into the moment**

- *Share a small but meaningful action (thumbing the keys to her first apartment)*
- *Or a physical detail combined with a bit of dialogue (e.g., He didn't cry. He just got very quiet and said, "I didn't think anyone cared.")*

3. **Then it hands all of the credit to the donor.**

- *The donor wasn't there, but they should feel like they were. And they should know that this moment exists because of their gift.*

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

THE IMPACT STORY

ITS JOB: SHOW THE DONOR WHAT THEIR GIFT DID (WEEKS TO MONTHS AFTER THEY GAVE)

Mary wanted me to tell you thank you, but she also said that doesn't really cover it. The night she and Liam moved into their apartment, the one with the carpet and the window shaped like a rainbow, Liam walked through every room twice just to make sure it was real.

Then he sat down in the middle of the living room floor, looked up at her and said, "We live here now?" "We live here now," she told him. He didn't say anything else. He just lay down on the carpet and stared up at the ceiling.

Mary stood in the doorway for a long time and watched him. Then she went to the kitchen, turned on the faucet and happy cried quietly so he wouldn't hear.

Because of you, that moment happened; because of you, a little boy who spent months sleeping in the backseat was lying on the carpet, staring at the ceiling that keeps him warm and safe. You did that.

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

IMPACT STORIES BUILD TRUST

The donor doesn't need to know that the program worked. ***They need to know that their “yes” worked.***

The Impact Story takes a gift that is weeks or months old and turns it back into a present feeling.

Impact Story framework:

- **The Before** - *Where things were at their worst, specific enough that the donor remembers what was at stake.*
- **The Turning Point** - *The moment that things changed because of the donor.*
- **The After** - *Where things are now; proof that something positive happened because of the donor.*

THE IMPACT STORY ISN'T JUST ABOUT CLOSING THE LOOP. IT'S ALSO ABOUT BUILDING TRUST FOR THE NEXT GIFT.

Source: Stories that Raise Money by Chris Davenport

EXERCISE

THE BEFORE/DURING/AFTER STORIES

- Appeal story — before help arrives
- Thank you story — immediately after help arrived
- Impact story — deeper effect of the help provided

Think of one person your organization has served, OR a fictional person, to serve as the subject (hero).

Pick one type of story — The Appeal, The Thank You, The Impact — **and write it in a few sentences.**

04:59

A BIG MISTAKE MANY NONPROFITS MAKE

November 30
Start writing appeal letter

GivingTuesday
Different graphics

throughout December
Different campaign

December 31
"PLEASE GIVE!"

Sound familiar?

BUILDING YOUR YEAR-END CAMPAIGN

ONE MESSAGE. MANY CHANNELS.



DIRECT MAIL

PURPOSE:

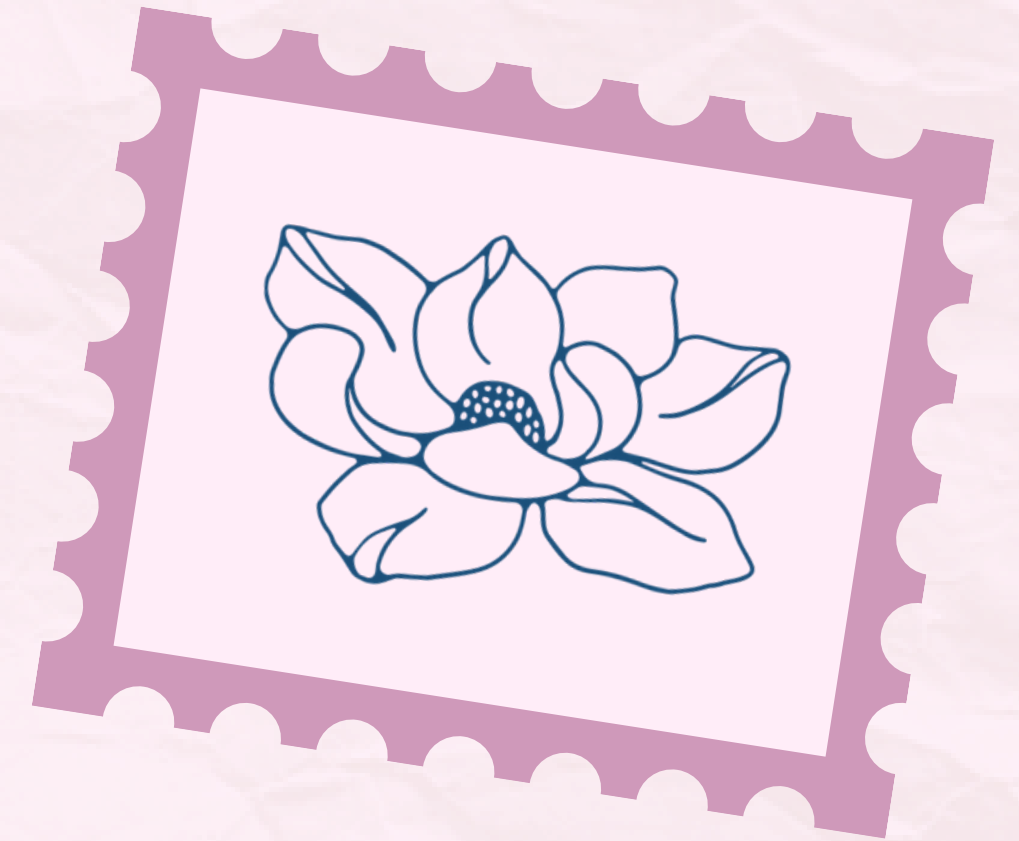
Tell the full story.

Slow the donor down.

Get personal.

A FEW TIPS:

- Have a response device AND a QR code
- Use a weird envelope (shape, design, crooked stamp, intriguing teaser line)
- Aim for 2-4 pages
- Simple language (6th grade reading level)
- Don't overdesign!



EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES

- Donor-centered and volunteer-centered events create real-life connection
- **You don't have to do a gala or golf tournament!**
- Consider a holiday celebration, coffee or dinner party, etc.

*Don't focus on making a perfect fundraiser; **focus on creating a memorable experience that tells great story.***



The Experience Lab by charity: water
charitywater



EXPERIENCE LAB

BY CHARITY: WATER



Watch on  **YouTube**

GIVING TUESDAY MESSAGING!

This is NOT a separate campaign. It's another chapter.

Same story; different urgency.

THE FINAL PUSH

December 30 and 31 are often among the biggest giving days of the year because donors are making year-end, tax-deductible gifts and nonprofits create authentic urgency around the calendar deadline.

**SAVE ONE OF YOUR STRONGEST STORIES AND CLEAREST
CALLS TO ACTION FOR THIS FINAL PUSH.**

DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DON'T

Be afraid to get creative and think outside of the box for your narrator!



DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DO

Share stories from different perspectives!

- A “boots on the ground” team member
- A volunteer
- An animal, mascot or inanimate object



(THIS ONE IS STILL IN THE WORKS)

For one client's milestone anniversary next year, we're creating a cartoon girl who lives on campus and discovers different parts of the org's history, meets key people and interacts with other clients.

We hope to have her serve as a connecting thread for anniversary-focused content throughout all of 2027.



DONATE LIFE: SAVE MY HUMAN CAMPAIGN

A Donor
Saved
My
Human



SaveMyHuman.com

DONATE LIFE: SAVE MY HUMAN CAMPAIGN

THE RESULTS:

- 7.2% increase in registries year over year in the state of KY
- 42% increase in national registries year over year
- 96% increase in earned media
- 85,000 digital media engagements for under \$3,000
- 16.8 million traditional impressions

Source: <https://priceweber.com/work/koda-save-my-human>



DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DON'T

**assume that your donor has seen your other messages
OR that they are experiencing your campaign in order.**



DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DO

make your ask and intention clear in each individual piece.

Each piece **MUST** stand independently of the others.



DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DON'T

think that your content needs to be perfect and polished.

You can create compelling videos without professional lighting, a teleprompter, an exact script, etc.



DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DO

what you can with the resources you have.

Stay within your brand guidelines and be consistent, but lean into what's real.



DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DON'T

forget — or be afraid — to actually make the ask!

You can't expect people to give without asking them to.

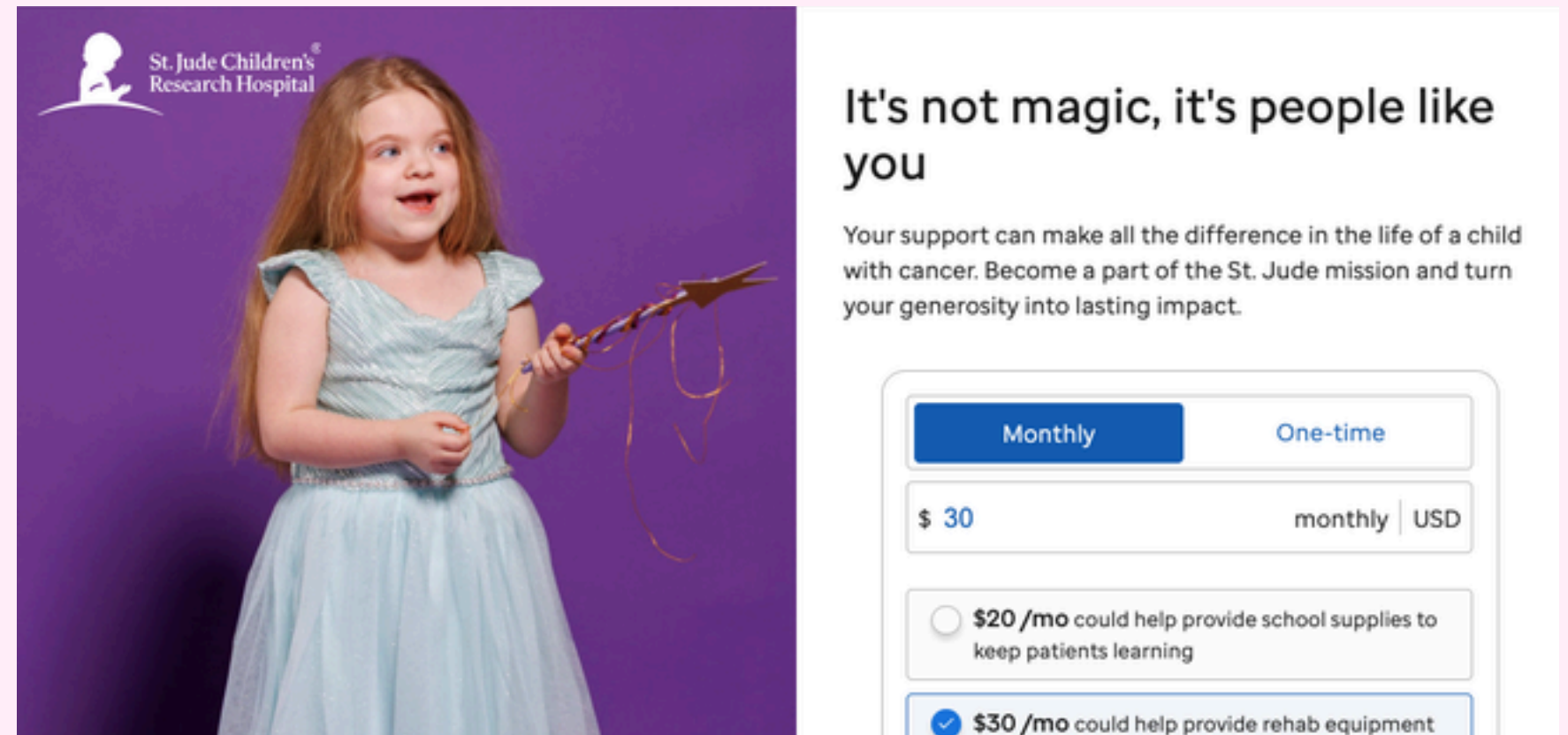


DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DO

make a clear ask and make sure to show the donor what their gift will tangibly do.

- \$20/month could provide a meal for a family of four
- \$100/month could provide a week's transportation to work
- \$500/month could provide a week's stay



DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DON'T

send the same things to everyone.

You don't have to reinvent the wheel, but you need to speak differently to each type of donor.



DOs and DON'Ts of fundraising through storytelling

DO

segment your lists and change copy to speak to the specific audience member.

(And a bonus DON'T: Don't overlook lapsed donors!)



TAKE HOME EXERCISE

LET'S PRACTICE

1. Choose one Do/Don't rule
 2. Write down how you can practically implement it this week in your content — social media, email, print, etc.
- (Later, review the rest and implement for your campaign.)

Then discuss with your table **what resonated with you most and why.**

04:59

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Tie all channels together through one core story
- Talk about the ONE and make your storyteller, primarily, and donor, secondarily, the hero
- Tell stories in different stages of completion, based on the goal of the communication (appeal, thank you, impact)
- Get creative
- Ask clearly — people want to help!



LET'S STAY CONNECTED

**IF YOU'D LIKE HELP TELLING
YOUR STORIES,
WE'D LOVE TO CONNECT!**

Magnolia Media Group

Email: stories@magnoliamedia.group

Scan the QR code to schedule a discovery call.

