



Bringing Mindfulness to Fundraising

By Beth G. Raps

I CAME TO MINDFULNESS as an organizer and then as a fundraiser. As a young organizer, I worked myself into the ground, equating doing with being. Within a few years, I had no adrenal function and had to rebuild. Now, I practice mindfulness willingly. Now, I am emotionally and spiritually resilient and have much more to offer others. And I have so much time. I hope this article spares you the long journey I took.

Mindfulness is paying sustained attention to the flow of thoughts in your mind with the aim of observing, not fixing or changing them. It helps us quiet our minds, reconnect them with our bodies, and develop embodied awareness.

This article aims to teach you to become more mindful in one area of your life with a two-part applied mindfulness practice for what the *Journal* calls resourcing—a more inclusive term than fundraising. In her article “Resourcing: Fundraising

as Part of Supporting and Building Community” (*Grassroots Fundraising Journal*, November/December, 2011), Susan Raffo describes resourcing as “a way of thinking about getting what we need” and how it “has come to mean how the collective body, or community, takes care of itself.” Resourcing includes fundraising as a way to care for our communities and ourselves.

By learning to “pay attention with a purpose,” you will begin to “look before you leap,” or more to the point, attend before you act, so that your work becomes easier and you find more peace in it. The ripple effect of this approach will extend far beyond raising money to raising the attention of communities.

Learning To “Spend” Your Attention Wisely

We love to talk about paying attention. Some spiritual leaders go so far as to call attention a “substance.” Many state that it is precious and in limited supply, so thinking of it in

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terms of money—“paying” attention—makes sense. Whether we like the money metaphor or not, when we are obliged to raise resources, we are likely to spend them more wisely. And if you are reading this, chances are that you are among those who have to raise resources.

In many respects, attention is no different from resources. Yet, we often spend it without a thought, giving it freely to matters that really don't deserve it. In the following paragraphs, I will try to show you how you can raise attention, so that you may be inspired to spend it more wisely, just as you do your resources.

Raising Attention: Ask Not How, Ask When

About raising attention, people generally ask: How do we do this? My answer is: When can you do it? When are you alert but quiet? Each person is different. If your answer is “never,” attend to that as your starting place.

How often must we do it? I propose you do it when you start a new campaign, are faced with a decision, or are sitting down to plan. Pretty soon you will be doing it before every meeting and each time you change tasks.

Proper mental preparation can turn us into resourcing ninjas. But too often mental preparation is used to score against other people, manipulate an agenda, and control the community rather than build and support it. Using attention-raising as the core of our mental preparation gives us power from within. Attending to our own minds first empowers us to be more present to others. It makes us less reactive, helps us notice what does not need doing, and makes us kinder and easier to work with, thus making us more attractive to the very resources we want—commitment, cooperation, and money.

Five Steps to Raising Attention

1. **Make a commitment:** Schedule with yourself to try this practice seven times for ten minutes per session. If everything that happens in your life is scheduled, only things that are scheduled will happen.
2. **Take a position:** Sit, stand, or walk quietly. Moving slowly is good for restless minds and absolutely counts.
3. **Observe:** Start by paying attention to the thoughts streaming through your mind. Just tune-in to this “second mind” (as Paulo Coelho calls it in *The Valkyries*) for the first couple of minutes of your 10-minute session. Learn to observe and accept the stream. It is not you, so don't jump in. If you do, notice it and climb out. Congratulations! You have now successfully used the first part of this two-part practice.
4. **Pick a Place:** This is the part that makes this exercise “applied” or vocational mindfulness. It is a shortcut that does not come from a meditation tradition but rather from mental prep gurus as ancient as Cicero. Close your eyes and look at yourself when you are observing the stream. Where are you? At the stream bank? On a cosmic sitting cushion? In your personal hermit's cabin? On a bus or train, looking out the window? Notice and validate this as your “stream observing” place. Having a clear idea of the location allows you to get back there easily and deliberately. Some people don't see when they close their eyes. If you are one of them, chances are you can feel, smell, or hear your place. For your first session, take the time to notice the details. Feel free to write a brief description or draw a picture and place it where you can access it easily.
5. **Act:** By the time you reach this step, you have access to wisdom that is tailored to your needs at the correct scale and level of detail. Trust it. In the place you have picked, ask one question, develop one idea, plan one meeting agenda per 10-minute session, especially if you are new to this tool. Do not go overboard, or you may end up back in the stream. Keep your word and stop when it's time, so you learn to trust your quieted mind. Encouraging self-trust encourages self-care, which helps us cooperate with ourselves and creates peace among the squabbling voices within us.

Immediately after each session, implement your new insights. Plan and structure, task and do. Acting on what you have received strengthens your ability to receive it. Try it with small stuff first so you don't scare yourself. You can always take a longer next session, or do another session soon.

Mindfulness in Action: An Example

Starting a new campaign, making a major decision, or sitting down to plan—these are all examples of when you may want to try this new practice. The following story tells how it can be used effectively in all three instances.

Zaina is a vocational mindfulness ninja. She has three kids, a full time job, and a partner; plus, she volunteers at her child's school. The flexibility of her schedule as a lead organizer for workers' rights and the key fundraiser for the organization allows

It is not a plan that Zaina would have thought of normally, but she trusts this insight and sees that it will work at several levels: (a) it gives the less-experienced staff member a challenge and a focus; (b) the campaign gets a powerful early boost; (c) loyal, larger donors get a chance to play a bigger role in the organization; (d) numerous smaller donors can feel good about having their wealthy allies step out ahead of them; and (e) the organization is able to show off the support it enjoys across all economic classes and present itself in a new light.

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her to volunteer during the day. It also allows her to overwork, try too hard to multitask, and to lose her patience if she is not careful. So, she practices mindfulness at the start of every workday, wherever she happens to be—at home, on the bus, or in the organization's large windowless office. The place she goes to observe her thought stream is a mossy black rock high above.

Zaina's organization was embarking on a capital campaign to raise a quarter million dollars. Not a large amount by capital campaign standards but the largest for her organization. As the mentor of the point-person for the campaign, Zaina was asked to review the campaign timeline. She did, and in her own words, "freaked out."

This is where her discipline in vocational mindfulness paid off and Zaina immediately pulled herself together, placed her feet firmly on the floor, and began to observe her thought stream. In a couple of minutes, she was above the tumble of her thought stream on her mossy rock, looking down on the timeline and her recent "freak out." And she was able to ask herself: "How can I reorganize this timeline in as few steps as possible so that we can raise as much money as possible from all our donors, while at the same time empowering my coworker's leadership and making my own work easier?" Finally, she sat back and allowed the answer to enter her thoughts.

The key to sensing or simply knowing the answer lies in Zaina's centering herself and staying calm—not enough to push the answer in any particular direction but to listen and to trust. If all she hears is silence, it is generally a sign that she is on to something big and needs to set aside more time for the decision, and to encourage others to do the same, too.

This time, however, the answer comes quickly: focus on donors who can give the most first, revise the timeline, and check back in a follow-up session using the mindfulness tool.

When Zaina leaves her "place," she is not only calmer, she has a workable strategy that extends beyond the timeline to share with her coworker. ■

Beth Raps, Ph.D. is founder of RAISING CLARITY and its lead consultant/coach. The abundance plans that she designs flourish in the lazy, elegant, and effective clarity groundwork that she lays with her clients. She offers this article with gratitude to the great writers on mindfulness, especially Thich Nhat Hanh. If you are new to this literature and would like to learn more, please email her at bethraps@raisingclarity.com.

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