

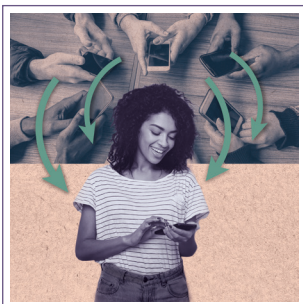


Improve Your Fundraising with  
the Social Norms Principle

## What phrase tripled the number of people who left a charitable bequest in their wills?

IF YOU DON'T ASK, you don't get. An experiment offering free will preparation services in the U.K. found that just mentioning the option of making a bequest to a nonprofit doubled the number of people who did so. The kicker was adding the phrase, "Many of our customers like to leave money to charity in their will."

Bequests went from 4.9% of those making a will to 15.4%. And the average gift amount doubled — from \$3,100 to \$6,661. What about that phrase awakened philanthropic instincts? It was the desire to belong to the majority of people who were being charitable.



### SOCIAL NORMS

#### People Like to Be Part of the In-Crowd

People's behavior tends to follow what others around them are doing. You can influence people's actions by letting them know that others are taking those same actions. Help donors or participants align their behavior to what's socially acceptable by informing them of what that norm is.

## Social Norms Stem Student Drinking

A Montana college had a problem with student drinking. No one wants to be part of the in-crowd more than a college student and nothing is as exaggerated as the amount of drinking that college students do. To clear up that misconception, the college adopted a widespread educational campaign that stressed the fact that the majority of Montanans do not drink.



One ad corrected the misperceived norms on college campuses by asserting, “Most (81%) of Montana college students have four or fewer alcoholic drinks each week.” And they didn’t stop at one vice. For smoking: “Most (70%) of Montana teens are tobacco-free.”

The strategy has produced big improvements in the accuracy of social perceptions and brought students’ behavior in line with the actual norms, decreased drinking and smoking rates.

### Apply Social Norms to Your Fundraising

- Feature a running ticker of people who have donated to your organization or campaign to show that many people support your cause.
- Use past appeals to build support for a new campaign, such as “87% of our members donate to our Thanksgiving Meal campaign.”
- Change the call to action on your TV ad from “Operators are waiting, please call now,” to “If operators are busy, please call again,” to create the impression that many people are eager to donate.
- Highlight people from different social groups representing your donor base to create a sense of support from a wide constituency.
- Combine with the Self-Connection Principle: “Many investment bankers like you support our organization at the \$10,000 level.”

Remember, for the social norm principle to work, the vast majority of people have to be in the “norm” category so that there is a feeling of being left out of the “in group.” And not everyone wants to conform. Harley Davidson crafted a successful brand by appealing to people’s defying-the-norm, “rebel” identity.



Red Rooster Group uses behavioral science to help nonprofits raise more money, create effective marketing, and improve their programs. Our Behavior Change Cycle and Fundraising Action Pack card deck help nonprofits put behavioral principles into practice. Contact us to tap into our insight.



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*Wake up your brand!*