



By Steve Adams

# COMMUNICATION THAT PROMPTS ACTION

*Effective communication is key to successful fundraising. Our work may be excellent, but if we do not talk or write about it in a way that encourages supporters to act, we will find it difficult to raise the funds we need.*

Effective communication does not just carry a clear message, it triggers the part of the brain that leads to action.

Our brains contain billions of nerve cells that coordinate thought, behaviour, movement, memory, sensation and mood. While all the parts of the brain work together, each part is responsible for a specific function.

For the purpose of this article, it can be helpful to think of the brain as consisting of two major parts:

- the **outer brain**, responsible for forming opinions and reaching conclusions
- the **centre brain**, where decisions are made and actions begin.

Whenever we communicate, we either speak to the outer brain or the centre brain. Here are some ways to help make

sure our communication influences people to act by speaking to the centre brain. These actions may include giving, praying or volunteering.

## START WITH WHY



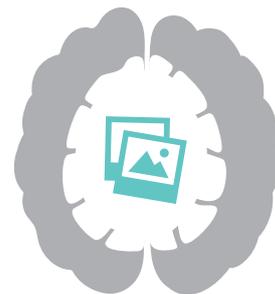
It is often easier to talk or write about **what** we are doing rather than **why**. However, if we start by explaining why our work is important, we speak to the centre brain and encourage action.

An example of **what** we are doing might be: 'Through health and hygiene training we are supporting communities to end the practice of open defecation and build latrines.' The listener may conclude that the work is good (outer brain), but they may not act on the information we have given them.

However, if we explain **why** this work is important, we will be speaking to their centre brain and they are more likely to want to respond. For example, 'Open defecation is causing ill health from preventable illnesses such as diarrhoea. Young children and the elderly are particularly badly affected and some have died. In addition, some women have been attacked while looking for a place to relieve themselves after dark.'

Everything else that we need to say about the project – what we are doing, how we are working, who is involved, where and when – will then follow on naturally. This is because the 'why' information acts like a lens, bringing the 'what' information into focus and making it more meaningful.

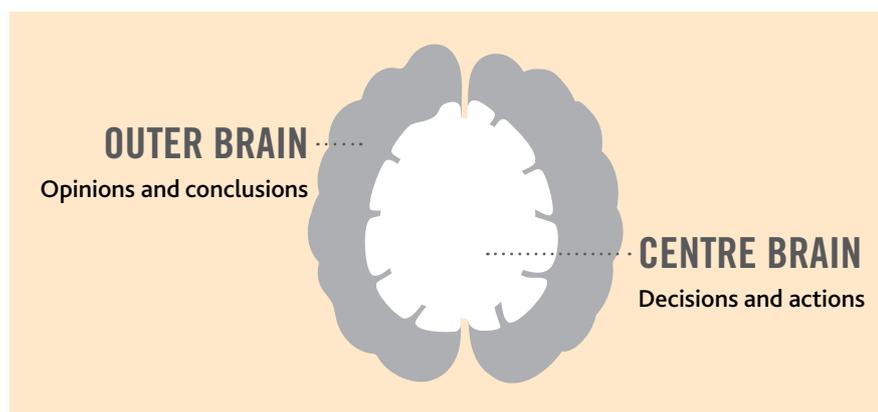
## PICTURES



Most of what we see, feel and experience is stored in our brains as pictures. It is these images that affect our emotions and cause a response in the centre brain.

Think about your favourite food, the room you woke up in this morning, someone you love, a musical instrument. Did you see any words, or did your brain create pictures?

It is important that we communicate with supporters in a way that helps them to



form pictures in their minds. This will make what we say and write more interesting, understandable and memorable, encouraging them to act and give.

*Jesus presented many of his messages in the form of pictures.*

- *When teaching about God's love and care he spoke about flowers, sparrows and the hairs on people's heads (Matthew 6:28; 10:29–31).*
- *He spoke of a mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, a pearl and a fishing net when teaching about the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:31–51).*
- *He compared believers to a town on a hill with lights that cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14).*

### EMOTIONAL CONNECTION



The way we feel about something or someone affects the way we act. People are more likely to want to support our vision if they feel emotionally connected to us and the people we are working with.

By telling stories, we can help supporters connect with individuals and communities, even if they will never have the opportunity to visit.

Good stories use language that forms pictures in people's minds. They also help people to understand why our work is important. For example, a story may explain how families who lost their homes and livelihoods in an earthquake are being supported to rebuild their lives, giving them hope for the future.

Wherever possible use direct quotes, or the whole story can be told from the perspective of a community member. Photos and videos help to bring stories alive (see pages 9–11). Always ask

## ACTIVITY: TWO MINUTES TO SPEAK!

Imagine that you have two minutes to excite someone about your work. What would you say?

Remember to start by explaining **why** your work is important before talking about **what** you do. Encourage emotional connection by using a story and speaking in a way that creates pictures in the

mind of the listener. Use contrast to stimulate action (see below).

Write out what you would say and then find a friend and practise saying it out loud. Once you have rehearsed your two-minute speech, you will always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you what your organisation does!

permission before using images and stories to promote your work.

When asking people to support our work, if we provide only one option the brain will provide its own contrast and this might be 'do not respond'.

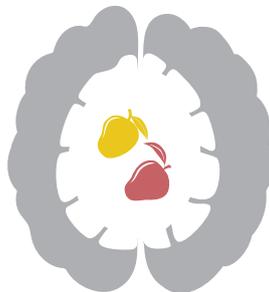
Our communication should clearly illustrate the contrast between doing nothing (eg people getting sick with diarrhoea) and supporting communities to improve their situation (eg better hygiene and sanitation). We can also present several good options for people to choose from, for example: pray, give and/or volunteer.

*As well as developing strong personal relationships with the people around him, Jesus spoke in a way that connected emotionally with his listeners. He used stories that people could understand and easily relate to.*

*Examples include the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24–27), the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) and the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31–32). Jesus used these stories to illustrate important truths about trust, love for neighbours and the kingdom of heaven. He used them to explain **why** these things are important, before talking about **what** should be done in response.*

*Jesus knew the difference between right and wrong, but he wanted his listeners to think for themselves. He used contrast to help people think about the consequences of their decisions. For example, is it better to build your house on rock (following Jesus) or sand (hearing Jesus' words but not acting on them)?*

### CONTRAST



If you see a stall selling red mangos, your brain will take longer to decide whether to buy them than if you see a stall selling both red and yellow mangos. This is because your centre brain – which decides whether or not to buy – uses contrast to make a decision.

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*Steve Adams and Tearfund have developed an e-learning course on centre brain communication. If you would like to know more, please email [emma.raspin@tearfund.org](mailto:emma.raspin@tearfund.org) or write to Emma Raspin, Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington TW11 8QE, UK.*