A Case to Remember

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King stood in front of millions of people and said, “I have a dream.”

He did not say, “I have an interim strategic plan and a couple of overheads.” He had a vision for what he thought the world could be and he declared it boldly.

This kind of thinking should guide the development of your Case for Support. Your ability to envision a bold future for your organization and to articulate that future in a Case for Support will be the key to attracting the resources necessary to make that future possible.

The strength of a Case for Support is directly proportional to its ability to relate to the personal interests and concerns of the reader. It should motivate the reader and convince them that their contribution is absolutely critical to success, while reassuring them that making a significant commitment will be as rewarding for them as it is for your organization.

A convincing, documented Case is not a shopping list of needs. It correlates opportunities to improve or expand programs, and/or solve problems, to the vision for the future. A quality and effective Case has simplicity, good taste, and a logical order.

The Effective Case for Support

An effective Case will benefit your organization in the following ways:

- Demonstrate agreement among leadership on the projects to be funded in relation to a strategic/long-term plan—scope, relevance, and priority
- Aid in enlisting influential volunteer leadership for the campaign
- Provide the content basis for all printed materials related to the campaign
- Serve as a conversation piece for effective cultivation and solicitation

Characteristics of a Convincing Case for Support

As the Case is being crafted, keep in mind the reader’s concerns and questions, because the ultimate goal is to engage and involve the reader. Common questions that readers will have that should be addressed in the Case are:

- What is the vision for the future and/or the problem to be solved by your organization?
- What is being done to achieve that vision/address that problem?
- What still needs to be done?
• Why does it need to be done now? What is the urgency?
• What does your organization propose to do and what impact will it have?
• Why is your organization the right organization to do this?
• What will it cost?
• What action should the reader take?

Other important characteristics of a convincing Case for Support are:

**It is bigger than the organization…**
Your vision must reflect value to society, not just to your organization. How will quality of life be improved long-term, rather than short-term? Emphasize the ability of your organization to seize an opportunity and/or solve a problem in the world today.

**Be “worthy” not “needy”…**
Remember, crisis fundraising based on a needy narrative tends to be transactional and has limited potential. Significant philanthropy is developed through demonstrating the worth of your organization. Focus on opportunities, not needs. Present your organization and your vision for the future as worthy of investment.

**It has broad appeal…**
Your readers may be varied and diverse, but can be united on the vision presented. Remember, your organization is seizing an opportunity or addressing a problem to benefit the greater community.

**It is supportable…**
You must provide evidence that your organization is capable of advancing a plan to achieve the vision reflected in the Case for Support and that the people involved are capable of achieving the objectives.

**It is centered on matters of current interest…**
Focus on the future rather than the past. Focus on what must be done now to seize tomorrow’s opportunities/solve tomorrow’s problems, rather than what was done yesterday to meet today’s needs.

**It is both rational and emotional…**
Write **logically** to engage the intellect and **passionately** to evoke an emotional response—the head and heart work together. The reader should feel pride in the organization, high hopes for the future, and a sense of moral purpose which leads to a desire to become part of making the future possible.

**Be brief…**
Write it simply and clearly. Can you do this in 6 to 8 pages?
Be optimistic…

Express confidence in your ability to accomplish your goals and objectives, “We will be successful—this is too important.” Philanthropy and altruism flourish in an atmosphere of optimism. Do not resort to statements like “We will fail if you do not help.” Instead, focus on the outcome, “With your support we will be able to achieve these worthy objectives.” Your goal is to convince your readers that their gift, at this time, will bring them the rewards they desire by helping to further an outstanding cause.

Effective fundraisers do not talk about hospitals, emergency rooms, or outpatient clinics—they talk about health. They do not talk about schools, colleges, and endowments—they talk about education and the search for truth. They do not talk about galleries, theatres, books, symphony halls, or hangings—but the enrichment of life.

It is imperative to create an effective and convincing Case for Support to be successful in meeting your organizational goals. What your organization does contributes to the improvement of the quality of life. Express that. Because of what you do, the world is a better place.

About The Compass Group

The Compass Group headquartered in Alexandria, VA, provides strategy, education, and coaching to organizations that must be successful in fundraising. In a working partnership with your staff, volunteers, and board, Compass will help you to enhance and develop the philanthropic culture of your nonprofit organization and achieve fundraising success. Our specialty areas include Arts & Culture, Environmental, Health Care, Higher Education, Human Services, and Independent Schools.

About Frank Pisch

Frank S. Pisch is a senior fundraising executive and nonprofit leader with more than 40 years of successful experience. His strengths include board and staff training, campaign design and management, board and staff development, effective utilization of volunteers and all other aspects of fundraising, including creation of effective fundraising teams.

Mr. Pisch has consulted on capital campaigns and major gift fundraising and strategic planning for a wide spectrum of nonprofit organizations, private and four-year colleges, public universities, community colleges, university foundation boards, independent schools, hospitals and medical centers, human service and environmental agencies, youth groups, arts organizations, and trade associations.

Mr. Pisch has helped his clients raise more than $4 billion, and as a major gifts specialist he has been involved in the successful solicitation of more than 200 gifts of $1 million or more.