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## Brilliant Ideas to Build a Storytelling Culture for Fundraising

As the Executive Director of [Pinky Swear Foundation](#), Erica Neubert Campbell knows one of her main roles is fundraising, but she doesn't consider herself to be a fundraiser. Instead, she is Pinky Swear's "Storyteller in Chief." Erica has found that telling stories and developing a storytelling culture at the Foundation has been the best way to build relationships and spark interest and commitment with potential supporters.



The first story you are likely to hear about Pinky Swear, is their origin story: 9-year-old Mitch Chepokas overhears a family talking about not being able to afford Christmas presents. Mitch decides to empty his bank account and share all he has with the families who are in the cancer ward at the hospital where he is receiving treatment for bone cancer. Mitch asks his father to 'pinky swear' to do the same the next year, after Mitch is gone. You can see the story [here](#) – bring tissues.

Building on a beautiful foundational story, Erica and her amazing team knew they could reach the hearts and minds of donors, volunteers, staff, and community members by improving their own abilities to share powerful stories. Here are two brilliant ways they have done just that: *(Scroll down to read more.)*

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| July 12 & 14<br>11am - 12pm PT          | July 26 & 28<br>11am - 12pm PT               | August 15 & 17<br>11am - 12pm PT                             |

## Survey on Stories and Narratives in the Philanthropy Sector

The Council on Foundations and the Center for Public Interest Communications at the University of Florida are partnering on research to evaluate the stories and narratives being used in the foundation and non-profit sectors and to use the findings to inform communication and storytelling recommendations.

They need your help to get a fuller picture of how professionals in the foundation and non-profit world are using stories now. They ask that you take a brief 5-minute, IRB-approved survey to help capture a fuller picture of narratives around philanthropy.



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Here is the link to the survey: [https://ufl.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_08OwQD6fRU6XGm2](https://ufl.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_08OwQD6fRU6XGm2)

Please DO NOT take the survey if you are under 18 years old or do not live in the United States.

They look forward to your valuable contribution!

## Brilliant Ideas to Build a Storytelling Culture for Fundraising (cont.)



Image by cookie\_studio on Freepik

### **Story at staff meetings**

At least once a month at staff meetings, the Pinky Swear team does an exercise led by All-Star Engagement Manager, Sue Ratcliff. Sue's role at Pinky Swear is to connect with families who are battling cancer (who they call "All Stars"). For the team exercise, Sue will share information from an interview with a family, write up a story version, and then each staff member will practice sharing the story. They don't read it word for word. Instead, they

practice telling it in their own words; how they might share it with a potential donor or supporter. This way the story won't feel like a canned speech but will come from the heart.

Erica says having every member of the staff practice storytelling is a huge part of their culture of philanthropy. "Whether you are an office assistant, accountant, or lead fundraiser, you have an important part to play in fundraising and philanthropy." Story practice enables every member of the staff to communicate what they do through a story of impact.

## The story tour

Sometimes donors and potential donors come by the office at Pinky Swear for a meeting or tour. They want to see what the foundation is all about, but they have a rather small office filled with cubicles. How could this inspire donors?

Lacey Kraft, Vice President of Philanthropy, came up with a game-changing way to give an office tour. She envisioned story stations that were set up strategically to create a flow through their office. By the time you finish the tour, you understand the Pinky Swear Foundation mission and are enamored with not just *what* they do, but *how* they do it.

I got to take an abbreviated version of the tour via Zoom. Erica started by bringing me to "Mitch's Corner." This is a collection of Mitch's memorabilia, like his yellow rain boots, a fireman's hat and Wheaties box. There is a story about each item.

Next to Mitch's Corner, a small pink leotard lays over the back of a kid's chair next to a picture of Victoria. Victoria's mom got a phone call about her daughter's cancer diagnosis right after a dance class. So, they rushed to the hospital with Victoria still wearing her blush pink leotard.



When a donor interacts with each object, the story of these kids and their families become visceral and emotional. When I saw the mud that is still on the bottoms of Mitch's yellow rainboots, right away I imagined him splashing and laughing in the rain. I felt connected to him.

Across the office is another station where they put together their Orange Envelope program. This program is often the first connection they make with a family battling childhood cancer. The staff stuff these envelopes with gift cards for immediate needs, a guide to resources and words of support. Right next to the big orange envelopes is a photo of James, so whoever is giving the tour can connect the impact of this program through James's story.

The tour isn't over yet! There is a wall of pictures of several kids the foundation has worked with. The tour guide can ask which picture speaks to you, and then they can tell the story of that kid and their family: who they are, what their goals and dreams are and how Pinky Swear is supporting them every step of the way.

The Pinky Swear Foundation has been very strategic and purposeful about putting storytelling to work. When asked why that is, Erica makes it sound like a no-brainer. "We realized that's where we get the most traction. People come and they are

genuinely moved.” Erica sheepishly admitted she doesn’t always add a financial ask to the end of the story. Oftentimes, she doesn’t need to. After taking the tour and hearing the stories, people reach out to her to find out more about how they can support the work.

The Pinky Swear team has also found that the families they have served value their stories being seen and heard. They love telling their stories and see that as a way to support the organization that supported them during a difficult time.

If you want your organization to become a storytelling culture, borrow these great ideas from Erica and her team: tell stories at staff meetings and make them part of your office tour. I promise, you will create lasting connections with your supporters. In fact, I pinky swear.



## About Us

This edition of *free-range thinking* was written and edited by Kirsten Farrell. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit [www.thegoodmancenter.com](http://www.thegoodmancenter.com).

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