

free-range thinking™ is a monthly journal of best practices, resources and generally useful stuff for public interest communicators who want to reach more people with more impact



# **Are You Still Deficit Framing?**

Let's play a game. Below are the opening lines of introductions to two people I found featured on well-known nonprofit websites. One intro is for a client and one for an Executive Director. Can you tell which is which? (Please note that language and identifying features have been changed because we are not here to shame anyone).

Randy's life was hectic. He survived childhood against the odds, but his potential was clouded by dropping out of school and spending time behind bars. Growing up in a broken home, he got mixed up in illegal activities and struggled with addiction.

Elizabeth is a leader whose dedication to fighting homelessness and supporting communities is unmatched. Her decades-long service record shows unwavering commitment to building equitable and sustainable solutions to issues of social justice, housing, and food insecurity.



Can you tell which is the client and which is the ED? I'm guessing you can. Very easily. Why? Because shaking the habit of deficit-framing the people our organizations serve has proven to be challenging for the public interest sector. It's the water we've been swimming in, and like the Tiktaalik did about 375 million years ago, we're gonna have to crawl out of that water and live on land. (Please scroll down for full story.)

#### Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center

**RUN MEETINGS** 

Meetings for People who Hate Meetings

September 16 & 18 9am - 10am PT PLAN CAMPAIGNS

Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter

September 30 & October 2 11am - 12pm PT TELL STORIES

Ethical Storytelling: The Case for Asset Framing

October 7 & 8 11am - 12:30pm PT

### Take a "Real Good Survey"



Do you work in or study the field of public interest communications? Please help our friends at the Center for Public Communications at the University of Florida describe and define the field by taking part in their brief, less-than-15-minute Real Good Survey.

You can add your email at the end if you are interested in learning the results. I know I did!

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

## Are You Still Deficit Framing? (cont.)

The good news is that we already know how to asset frame. Need proof? We asset frame the Elizabeths of the world. We asset frame our CEOs, EDs, Staff, donors, and volunteers. We do it intuitively. They, too, may come from broken homes or may have struggles with addiction, and maybe they even share that part of their story. BUT, we don't introduce them that way on our websites, at our galas, or in our annual reports.

The goal is to practice introducing our clients/partners/neighbors the same way.

"Randy is a fierce advocate for social justice and the power of second chances. He has committed the last 20 years of his life to advocating for systems change and becoming a role model for his son. Randy devotes his life to this, because he has made the most of his second chance.

Randy survived childhood against the odds... [continue story]"

For organizations that advocate social justice, anything other than assetframing is antithetical to the work you do. Deficit framing perpetuates the judgments and myths behind who *needs help* and who *gives help*. It is an ethical pothole too many of us drive right into.



**Trabian Shorters** 

This fall, we are excited to offer a virtual session of our <a href="Ethical">Ethical</a>
Storytelling workshop. In the class you will dig deeper into <a href="Trabian">Trabian</a>
Shorter's concept of Asset Framing, practice it in your stories, and explore more frameworks and resources for storytelling that deepen your impact while honoring your mission and the people you serve.

Until then, practice making the intros for your Randys sound a lot more like the intros for your Elizabeths. That's a move in the right direction.

#### **About Us**

This edition of *free-range thinking* was written by Kirsten Farrell and edited by Jasmine Elist. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit <a href="https://www.thegoodmancenter.com">www.thegoodmancenter.com</a>.

To reach the Goodman Center directly, please call (323) 272-4737 or send an email to kirsten@thegoodmancenter.com.

To subscribe to this newsletter, click here

